Call Me By Your Name

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Call Me By Your Name

by Shotgun_sinner

Summary

It's the summer of 1983, and precocious 17-year-old Will Graham is spending the days with his family at their 17th-century villa in Lombardy, Italy. He soon meets Hannibal, a handsome doctoral student who's working as an intern for Will's father. Amid the sun-drenched splendor of their surroundings, Will and Hannibal discover the heady beauty of awakening desire over the course of a summer that will alter their lives forever.

A Hannigram, Call Me By Your Name AU

Notes

This came because I have been OBSESSED with Call Me by Your Name since I watched it a month ago. There was a Twitter prompt that asked for Hannigram as Elio and Oliver, and.... well, this damned thing ate my life for the last week.

It will follow the movie closely initially, then veer off into some Hannigram territory. Overall, I am VERY proud of this, and can't wait to share it with you. It is a work in progress, so please. Bear with me.

Warnings ahead of time for those of you who don't know the story: Will is 17. Hannibal is 25.

They each take female lovers, though nothing there will be very explicit. Overall, this is THEIR love story, and I promise you guys a happy ending.

Chapter 1

September 1994
Quantico, VA

"I said I was going, so I'm *going*," Will said, bursting through the office doors with a coffee in his hand. "I just don't feel like I need to go, and I don't like being ambushed!"

Alana followed after him, her heels clicking quickly with his fast pace. He was late to his own class, and he hated to be late. "It's for your own good, Will," she pleaded. "Jack and I think-"

"I know what you and Jack think," Will said heatedly, hoisting his shoulder bag higher up his shoulder as he headed into the academy. "You both think I am bad at my job, and I can't handle the things I see, right?"

"We never said that," she sighed, grabbing his arm before he headed into his classroom. "I think you're incredible at your job. I also think… maybe you should just *talk* to someone about it. There's no harm in that, Will. Dr. Petersen came highly recommended by my mentor during my internship."

"I had a… momentary breakdown at a crime scene," Will said in exasperation. "It was less than five minutes of shock, Alana."

"That resulted in a blackout," she grimaced. "Please, Will. What happened in Jack's office wasn't an ambush. It was… out of concern. I hate that you think people don't care about you, because we do."

"Right," Will snorted. "I'll be there at five. Tell your… Dr. Petersen that I will be there. I'm late for my class."

"Are we…" she hesitated, shifting her feet. "Are we still on for dinner tonight?"

"Raincheck," he replied, sweeping into his classroom without a backwards glance.

His day was completely thrown off by the meeting with Jack this morning. His whole day was thrown off by everything that had happened since he woke up. He slept through his alarm, then woke up late. In his hurry to get the dogs fed and outside before going to work, he brewed his coffee without a fucking carafe under the percolator.

Coffee went everywhere, except in his bloodstream where he needed it most.

He stepped in dog crap on the way to the car, which he then smeared into the carpet of his Volvo. It was still there, more shit waiting for him when he left work later.

On top of everything else, the moment he got in the door he was attacked by his boss and a woman who up until this morning, he'd considered dating.

It honestly served him right for even considering it.

Profiling for the FBI and teaching at Quantico had been his dream. He'd alienated his parents by choosing this career. He'd given up a life that promised comfort and ease in order to save lives and do some good in the world.

He gave up *everything* for this. Summers in Italy by the lake with family and friends. Quiet winters in Switzerland by the fire. Vacations to Germany, France, Spain, Morocco. All so he could do something that made him happy.

The only way to find true happiness was to risk being completely cut open.

He'd risked himself too many times, and there was nothing left of him, anymore. Just flayed bits and pieces of Will Graham stitched back together time and time again.

His parents still called him sometimes, though… they never knew what to say to him. His mother didn't know what to say to him when he was younger, either. Besides his parents, there was no one left who cared about him. He used to say that his loneliness had made him numb, that the sting of it didn't bother him anymore.

He had no idea how cold his life would become. He wasn't sure when the future went from being a promise, to a threat. He'd missed the signs, and he'd made mistake after mistake.

There was nothing for him here in the States. When he moved here, the excitement was high, and his ambitions were higher. He'd been accepted into Quantico, but… he was never popular. The way he worked crime scenes alienated him from his other coworkers, even if his solve-rate was high.

Yeah, the scenes weighed on him. They fucking weighed on everyone. He needed a therapist because he passed out at a crime scene that was so horrible that Jack Crawford puked his guts out when he saw it?

The world wasn't fair, and Will was jaded enough that he didn't even know who to hate anymore, so that hatred reflected towards himself.

He was good at his job, but he wasn't great. He did what he wanted with his life, but he was completely, utterly, depressingly, alone.

Aside from his dogs, that was.

The day didn't get better. His chicken salad sandwich he got for lunch was rancid. It tasted off, and he spat it out into the trash while trying not to retch. Instead of eating, he had a coffee that tasted like an ashtray, it was so stale and burnt.

By the time he got to his car to head to his non-negotiable therapy appointment, the entire interior of his car smelled of dog shit. He opened all the windows and threw the carpet out, leaving it in the Quantico parking lot.

His appointment was in Baltimore, which was a little bit of a drive from the FBI academy. He drove there with the windows down, hoping that the shit smell would work its way out of the car by the time he got there.

There was traffic heading into Baltimore, so he arrived a few minutes late to his appointment, barreling up the stairs to get into the building as quickly as he could. He headed around the corner towards the elevators where he slammed into another human being, full force.

Will stumbled back, grabbing the arm of the man to keep him from toppling over. “Fuck,” he breathed. “I’m so sorry!”

A regal hand swiped at his pristine suit, trying to unwrinkle it where Will had slammed into him. Will raised his eyes just as the man did, and his entire world collapsed around him.

“Hannibal,” he breathed.

Familiar amber eyes widened at him, his plush mouth falling open. “Will?”

They stared at one another for a moment, and Will let his eyes wander over him from head to toe. His hair was still soft-looking and ash-blonde, but he wondered if it was artificial, now. His face was still flawlessly beautiful, only the faintest creases of laugh lines around his eyes. Otherwise, he looked as beautiful now as he did eleven years ago.

His suit was utterly pompous. Charcoal with a cranberry red windowpane pattern on the blazer and slacks. His shirt was wine-red. It *almost* looked…

It almost looked like the one in his closet. The one that was faded and worn out, now.

He looked broader now than he was then. His chest bigger, his waist narrower. Although… that could be the pompous suit, too. “What are you doing here?” Hannibal breathed.

“I have an appointment with… uh, Dr… Parkinson?”

“Petersen,” Hannibal smiled, though it didn’t reach his eyes. “He’s a good friend.”

“Why are *you* here?” Will asked pointedly.

Hannibal pointed to a plaque behind him, gesturing towards the offices in the building. At the very top was a name he knew all too well. Dr. Bedelia du Maurier.

“Your wife’s office is in this building,” Will realized with a tight frown.

“It is,” Hannibal admitted softly.

“I thought you lived in New York?”

“We moved to Baltimore about three years ago, now,” he shrugged. “I read your monograph on time of death based on insect activity,” he said politely.

“Why would you have read that?” Will asked snidely. “It’s not your field of study.”

Hannibal blushed, his cheeks tinging pink. “I read it because you wrote it.”

“Fuck you,” Will spat, turning on his heels to leave the building.

“Will,” Hannibal called, jogging to catch up to him as he left the office building. “Will, please. Wait!”

“I’ve spent too much of my life waiting around for you, Hannibal Lecter,” he snapped, walking briskly towards his shitty little Volvo. “How fucking dare you say that to me?”

A firm hand grabbed his elbow, and he jerked it away. He turned around, angry enough that he wasn’t beyond the idea of throwing a punch, but the absolutely devastated expression on Hannibal’s face made him pause. “I *couldn’t*,” Hannibal said pleadingly. “I couldn’t keep you in my life, Will. That winter I called… just hearing your *voice* made me buy a plane ticket to come back to you. I was going to come back to you… but…”

“But you didn’t,” Will replied bitterly. “You chose her.”

“I’ve always chosen you, but…”

“But you couldn’t be in a relationship with a man?” Will asked, point blank.

“It wasn’t that simple,” he muttered regretfully.

“My dad tried to reach out to you the following summer,” Will told him. “To see if you and… and your *wife* wanted to come to the orchard for a few weeks. He was so fucking disappointed when the number he called was no longer in service. You just… abandoned me, Hannibal. You abandoned my family, even when they considered you their own.”

“I am not proud of it,” he whispered harshly. “I am not proud, Will. I couldn’t get over you. I couldn’t stop thinking about you. I had to do something drastic to move on. I need you to understand.”

“I understand perfectly,” Will said, voice wavering through tears that he refused to let fall. “You wanted to never see me again. I’ll make that decision easy for you. Sorry I bumped into your pompous fucking suit. Send me a bill if it needs dry-cleaning.”

He got in his car and peeled away from the curb, hands shaking while he drove back to Wolf Trap.

June 1983
Lombardy, Italy

“Oh!” Marzia giggled, turning to Will where he laid out across the bed he’d be sleeping in for the next six weeks. “He’s here, Will!”

Will rolled his eyes, coming to his feet to walk over to the opened window. She wasn’t being discrete about her interest in the new doctoral student, though Marzia hardly ever felt shy about anything.

He’d spent every summer in Lombardy, Italy for as long as he could remember. His mother, Elisabeth, owned an orchard that spanned for miles, and she liked to spend the summer and late fall here so she could be present for the harvest. His father, Harrison, was an archaeology professor who took in doctoral students for six weeks every summer.

Taking in summer guests was Will’s Dad’s way of helping young academics revise manuscripts before publication. Summer residents didn’t have to pay anything, they stayed here rent free and had free reign of the villa while they were here, provided they spent an hour or so a day helping Professor Graham with his correspondence and assorted paperwork.

Will knew that this specific candidate, Hannibal, was writing a manuscript on The Iliad and already had found a publisher in Italy for a translated version. Will’s father loved nothing better than to have some precocious rising expert in his field of study helping him.

Will hated the tradition with every fiber of his being.

He scowled out the window, looking down at the new doctoral student who would be in his damned room for the next six weeks. He was smiling politely at his parents, hands on his hips while squinting in the late afternoon sunshine. “Looks like a stiff,” Will remarked dryly, sliding his eyes over the crisp button-down shirt he was wearing as well as the neatly pressed slacks. The button-down was the color of red wine.

“You only say that because you get booted from your room,” she giggled, arching an eyebrow at him. “It’s only for six weeks.”

Spoken like someone who had no idea what it was like to give your bedroom to a complete and utter stranger for six weeks a year. It was the polite thing to do, yes. The other bedrooms in their villa were for the staff that worked at the house full-time. It wasn’t fair to kick out the staff from their bedrooms, so Will got booted from his own.

His bedroom was connected to a room that used to be a wardrobe. It had been converted into a very small bedroom at some point when Will was small, but there was no way to leave the room aside from either what was once the closet door back into Will’s room, or through the shared bathroom.

His mother hated the idea of a guest accessing their room through a bathroom, so Will got evicted for six weeks.

This would hopefully be the last year he’d have to stay in the house for a doctoral candidate. By next summer he’d be graduating high school and be heading off to college. He watched

his mother glance around, looking pointedly at his father with a scowl. “Where is Will?” she asked in Italian.

“I’d better go downstairs,” he sighed, slapping the windowsill for good measure.

They were making their way inside just as he came down the stairs, his mother glancing up at him with pursed lips. “Help take Hannibal’s things up to his room,” she asked, pointing at his suitcases while ushering Hannibal into the study.

He nodded at his mother, heading into the study where his dad was pouring Hannibal a glass of water that he took gratefully. He slammed the drink down, swiping his hand across his mouth just as Will came to his side. “This is my son,” his dad said proudly.

“Will,” he greeted, extending his hand for Hannibal.

“Hi,” he replied, accepting the handshake without really even making eye contact. Rude.

“I can show you your room?” Will asked, fighting the urge to purse his lips.

“That would be perfect,” Hannibal nodded, placing his empty glass on the desk. “Forgive me, Professor Graham, but I am tired.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” his dad smiled, waving him off. “Get some rest.”

Hannibal followed him up the stairs just as Marzia bounced down them. She kissed Will’s cheek as she passed, then, to Will’s dismay, air kissed both of Hannibal’s cheeks. “Marzia,” she introduced herself. “Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” Hannibal beamed.

Hannibal’s suitcases weighed a hundred pounds, and Will tried not to scowl as Hannibal watched Marzia bounce off down the stairs as she left. “My room is now your room,” he said, hoisting the suitcases into the bedroom.

The moment Hannibal made eye contact with the bed, he moaned. He flopped against it, boneless and exhausted. “We’re sharing this bathroom,” Will told him awkwardly, watching Hannibal take a deep inhale against his damned pillow. “It’s my only way out,” he continued, shifting his feet awkwardly.

The sharp snore that cut the air made him scowl harder, and he headed to his temporary bedroom/closet to close the door between them.

There was not very much to do in the summertime. With no classes, he usually spent most of his time either reading or writing music. He played the piano on days when it was cooler outside, saving the sweltering summer days for reading by the lake or the poolside. He put his headphones on, clicking play on his Walkman. The Talking Heads drowned out the sounds of Hannibal’s snoring while he sat at the very small desk in his temporary room, writing his sheet music.

The man was rude. Will didn't know him, but… he was rude.

Full of himself, almost.

Over his scowling, he heard Mafalda ring their dinner bell. His mother liked to believe that she ran the household, but Will knew the truth of it. Mafalda was the reason they ate every meal. She was the reason there was clean laundry and bedding. She took care of the house as if it were her own. She took care of Will as if he was her own.

He loved his mother, but she'd always been flighty.

After taking off his headphones, he debated over whether or not to wake Hannibal, who was still snoring loud enough to hear it through the door. With a sigh, he entered his room through the shared bathroom, crossing his arms while staring down at the sleeping man. "Uh," he said inelegantly. "Mafalda just rang the dinner bell. Dinner's ready."

Nothing. The snoring continued, and Will sighed again. Glancing over at the bookshelf by his side, he took the heaviest book he could find and dropped it against the wood flooring with a loud bang.

Hannibal shot up from the bed, glancing at Will with red-rimmed eyes. "Sorry," he deadpanned, picking up the book as if he'd dropped it accidentally. "Dinner's ready, though."

"I'm going to pass," he said exhaustedly. "Please, tell your mother to forgive my rudeness."

He flopped back to the bed and pulled the pillow to his face, snuggling into it. *Will's* pillow.

Will shook his head, heading out the door just as Hannibal called to him. "This is your room?" He hesitated by the doorway, looking up at Hannibal as he nodded his head. "Thanks buddy."

Buddy. Will scowled harder and left the room, heading downstairs for dinner.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Like I said, the story will somewhat follow the movie pretty closely initially. It WILL veer off into it's own territory soon, though.
>
> This is the last update for this week, as I'm going away for the holiday weekend and won't be back till Tuesday. Next update coming soon, though! Thank you guys <3333

1983

He headed outside for breakfast the next morning, wearing his bathing suit and a tee shirt. It was already scorching outside, and he planned to spend the day by the pool. His parents were in their usual spot, outside at the picnic table by the orchard while Mafalda and the other staff breezed around them. Will took a seat by his mother's side, and she reached out to ruffle his curls affectionately. "Good morning, my love."

"Morning," he drawled, leaning back in his seat as Mafalda set a four-minute egg down in front of him. "Thank you," he said with a smile, earning himself another affectionate ruffle from the woman.

Hannibal emerged, freshly showered and in shorts and a short-sleeved button-down, looking much more put together than he did the day before. "Morning," he greeted with a warm smile.

Will stared at him as he took his seat, watching his fingers scratch idly at the sliver of chest hair that protruded from the 'V' of his unbuttoned shirt. He took the other man in almost clinically, right down to the way his hair was swept aside, then to his amber eyes. His cheekbones were cut from glass almost, almost severe and timeless. Will knew he was twenty-five from his application, though it seemed impossible that the man in front of him was only seven years older than he was.

Will did not look like that. He doubted he ever would.

He grimaced to himself while cracking his egg to remove the top of it, scooping out the insides with the spoon.

Mafalda went around the table with fresh apricot juice, filling glasses until she got to Hannibal who looked up at her with a raised eyebrow. "*Succo*?" she asked. Juice?

“*Per favore*,” he nodded, pushing away his own egg that he’d pummeled to death with his spoon. He apparently didn’t know how to eat a four-minute egg, and Mafalda took pity on him. “Have another egg,” she offered, placing a fresh one in front of him. “*è così*,” she smiled, opening the egg for him with a quick crack of the spoon.

“Thank you,” he laughed, nodding in understanding.

“Did you recover from your trip, *Caro*?” his mother asked Hannibal.

“I did,” he said with a smile. “I apologize for missing dinner.”

“Think nothing of it,” his mother said dismissively.

“Are we close to town?” Hannibal asked after a bite of his egg. “I need to open a bank account while I’m here.”

Will snorted while his parents exchanged knowing looks. “No one in town has a bank account,” his father smiled.

“I could take him to Montodine?” Will wondered while smearing a slice of bread with honey.

“I think they’re closed for the summer,” his father shrugged. “Try Crema, maybe.”

“Is that your orchard?” Hannibal asked, nodding off towards the endless fields of fruit trees.

“Yes,” his father nodded. “Peaches, cherries, apricots,” he listed.

“Pomegranates,” his mother added with a smile.

Mafalda noticed that Hannibal finished his first egg and set another down for him, which he opened successfully this time before eating it quickly. He reached for his glass of juice, taking a hesitant sip before slamming it down with an enthusiastic hum of approval. With his head tilted back, his Adam’s apple bobbed with every swallow of juice, highlighting the strong curve of his jaw. His neck. Will swallowed thickly before averting his eyes back to his own plate.

Another egg was placed before him, and he laughed. “Have another egg,” his mother offered.

“No thank you,” he laughed, cheeks pinkening out of embarrassment. “I know myself. If I have three, then I’ll have four. You’ll have to roll me out of here.”

Will glanced up in surprise at hearing those specific words. *I know myself*, he said. It seemed unbelievable for someone his age to know himself, as Will had no idea, yet. He played the piano, but he wasn’t sure he loved it. He had a girlfriend, but he wasn’t sure he loved her, either. He couldn’t say what the hell he liked, really. Not truthfully. He looked down at his bread and honey, and he wasn’t even sure if he fucking liked that, either.

It must have been nice to know yourself well enough to proclaim something like that. Even if it was just about an egg.

After breakfast, he intended to creep away to head to the pool or the lake, but Hannibal… intrigued him. He stayed, following them into the study where his father was attempting to devise a new method for organizing his correspondence. So far, it didn't seem successful.

Hannibal was trying though, going through boxes of letters, and organizing them to his own liking. "My guest from last year was very good at organizing," his dad laughed, looking up at Hannibal sheepishly. "Me, on the other hand," he sighed.

His mother came in with a tray of apricot juice and glasses, pouring them each a glass before handing them off. Will sipped his, the sharp burst of sweetness on his tongue almost cloying. He watched Hannibal down his glass, licking his lips in appreciation. "Good," he smiled.

His mother laughed, taking his glass to refill it with the pitcher, and Hannibal downed that one, too. His mother looked pleased, and she pat Hannibal's shoulder affectionately before coming to share the sofa with Will.

She ruffled his curls, but Will was waiting for the yearly test his father had given each and every student that had stayed with them. "The word apricot comes from the Arabic - it's like the words "algebra", "alchemy", and "alcohol". It derives from an Arabic noun combined with the Arabic article 'al-' before it," he told Hannibal, who looked intent while listening to every word.

"The origin of our Italian '*albicocca*' was '*al-barquq*'. It's amazing that today in Israel and many Arab countries the fruit is referred to by a totally different name: '*mishmish*'."

Hannibal shifted his feet minutely, biting his lip. "I beg to differ, professor."

"Is that so?" his father asked knowingly.

"The word is not an Arabic word," he disagreed, hitting the nail on the head.

Wil grinned, sipping his apricot juice as Hannibal continued. "It's a long story, so bear with me. Many Latin words are derived from the Greek. In the case of 'apricot', however, it's the other way around." Hannibal paused to make eye contact with Will, the amusement on his face stilling Will's heart. "Here the Greek takes over from Latin. The Latin word was *praecoquum*, from pre-*coquere*, pre-cook, to ripen early, as in precocious, meaning premature."

His mother hummed by his side, and he glanced at her to find her entirely smitten by their new guest. "Byzantines - to go on - borrowed *praecox*, and it became *prekokkia* or *berikokki*, which is finally how the Arabs must have inherited it as *al-barquq*." He paused in his tirade, glancing around the room almost shyly. "Courtesy of Etymology 101."

"You're right," his father beamed, clapping Hannibal on the shoulder. He'd passed Harrison's test, which the four previous students couldn't claim to have done the same.

"He does this *every* year," Will sighed, sipping his apricot juice with a shake of his head.

“Every year,” his mother agreed, burying her fingers in his curls affectionately.

Later on in the afternoon, Will took Hannibal into Crema so he could open his bank account. They used bikes, as it was easier usually to navigate the small, cobblestone roads leading in and out of the towns. Hannibal was in great shape, and he kept up with Will easily enough as they rode out past the orchard, then the Vivaldi’s vineyards. The sun beat down on them as they meandered through the quiet town, their ride mostly quiet aside from Hannibal asking about their surroundings occasionally.

He waited outside while Hannibal went in to do whatever banking he needed to do, and he went to a small café to get them each an espresso before their ride back. Hannibal joined him with a few papers from the bank, sitting at the wrought iron table outside the café. “What do you do for fun around here?” he asked while folding the paperwork to put it in his backpack.

“Wait for summer to end,” Will deadpanned.

“And what do you do in the winter?” Hannibal laughed. “Wait, don’t tell me. Wait for the summer, right?”

Will laughed, shrugging his shoulders in agreement. “We come here for the summer, and… sometimes for Christmas vacation.”

“What do *you* do, Will?” he asked softly. He sipped his espresso, then downed it the way he did for everything he liked.

“I read,” he shrugged. “Transcribe music. Go to the lake. Go out at night, sometimes.”

Hannibal’s eyes trailed over him, and Will felt very specifically like hiding. “Well, I’m going to explore,” he announced, standing from the table. “Later.”

Will blinked in surprise while he watched Hannibal pedal off. He thought they were getting along, but… he was probably mistaken.

He headed back to the house, turning to see if Hannibal was going to follow him.

He didn’t.

Instead of going to the lake, he grabbed his guitar and went to sit outside under the shade of a tree. The heat wasn’t so oppressive anymore now that the sun was slanting through the trees, and he sat silently while playing Bach on the guitar.

Hannibal returned, gliding up with the bike next to Anchise, their gardener. He slid off the bike, greeting Anchise with a wide smile. Anchise greeted him politely, though he was too far away from them to hear what was said. What he did notice, however, was that Hannibal was speaking with him. Anchise did not know English, which meant that Hannibal was keeping

up with him in Italian. Something he didn't know about him, as he thought the man was an American.

He continued strumming his guitar, watching as Hannibal accepted a cherry tomato from Anchise's outstretched hand. He popped it into his mouth immediately, and even from so far away he could hear Hannibal's hum of approval.

Will kept playing even as Hannibal approached him, strumming his guitar even though he could feel the weight of Hannibal's gaze on him. He glanced up while playing, meeting amber eyes that almost looked… cold. Disinterested. He blushed, averting his eyes back to the neck of the guitar.

His fingers faltered, and he stopped playing. Clearly, Hannibal didn't like it.

Clearly, Hannibal didn't like him.

"Was that piece one of your own?" Hannibal asked, drawing Will's eyes back up to his. "Or is it… It sounds vaguely familiar. Play it again?"

"I didn't think you liked it," Will mumbled.

"Why would you think…?" Hannibal sighed, gesturing to the guitar. "Just play it again, would you?"

"Same one?" Will asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Same one," Hannibal agreed.

Will came to his feet, setting the guitar against the bench. "Come with me," he said, gesturing for Hannibal to follow him into the house.

He sat at the baby grand in the living room, playing the piece that he'd played on the guitar. He let every ounce of his frustration with Hannibal show in every note he struck, knowing full-well that Hannibal was watching him. He was listening to him.

"You changed it," Hannibal accused, crossing his arms. "Why? Is it Bach?"

"I just played it the way Liszt would have played it if he'd jimmied around with it," Will sniped.

"Can you play it the way you played it on the guitar?" he asked in exasperation.

Will grinned, this time playing the piece as sarcastically as he could. If Hannibal wanted to find something to tease him about, then Will would happily give it to him. "I can't *believe* you changed it. Again," Hannibal sighed.

"Not by much," Will grinned, glancing up at Hannibal's annoyed expression. "That's how Busoni would've played it if he'd altered Liszt's version."

"Play it the way Bach would have played it," he pressed.

“Bach never wrote it for guitar. In fact, we’re not even sure it’s Bach at all.”

“Forget it,” Hannibal huffed, uncrossing his arms to leave the room.

Will’s fingers automatically went back to the piano, and he played it with every ounce of passion that he’d played it on the guitar. He poured every bit of his emotions into it, allowing the slight melancholy to bleed through. The notes sounded pleading. Desperate. They sounded how Will felt. Hannibal paused by the doorway, closing his eyes as the music washed over him.

He played it beautifully, as though sending Hannibal a gift.

He almost never saw Hannibal over the next few days. It seemed like if Will entered a room, Hannibal was just leaving it. If he went to the pool, Hannibal went to the lake. He’d see him at breakfast and no where else, as if the other man specifically did not want to see him.

The thought hurt. He had no idea why, specifically, but it did.

He went into the kitchen four days after Hannibal’s arrival to find Mafalda searching the fridge. “What would you like for dinner, Caro?” she asked.

“Whatever my parents want,” he replied with a smile.

“I have to head into town,” she sighed.

“I’ll get us dinner,” he promised.

“*Pesce*?” she asked.

He nodded, heading out to get his fishing pole.

It was a little walk up to the river, but Will didn’t mind it. The sun was warm, but not scorching. He prepped his fishing rod, setting the bucket down next to him after scooping some water from the river into it, then cast his line.

He spent the afternoon at the river, casting his line while standing in the shade of the Willow trees along the edge of it. The river was fairly shallow, so no one came out here to swim or spend the day. It was just Will, and he didn’t mind that at all.

After four hours, he had six massive trout. He considered releasing a few of them, but decided that he’d bring them all. Mafalda could make the extra ones for herself and Anchise for dinner, too.

He loaded up the heavy bucket of fish and his gear into the little rusty wagon he’d brought for this purpose, walking back to the villa with early afternoon sunlight spilling through the trees.

His mother and Mafalda were in the kitchen together while Mafalda juiced more apricots. He gestured for her to follow him outside, which she did with a beaming smile. "*Grazie*!" she bubbled, clapping her hands while looking in his fishing bucket.

"Good?" he asked with a wide smile.

She ruffled his hair while Anchise took the bucket away, probably to prep the fish for dinner. "*Perfecto*," she laughed, then pressed a thankful kiss to his cheek.

Hannibal joined them for dinner that night, which was generally give or take. Sometimes he showed, sometimes he didn't. "Smells wonderful," he smiled, thanking Mafalda as she set a gorgeous plate of trout and summer vegetables down in front of him.

"You can thank my son for our dinner," his mother smiled, stubbing out the last of her cigarette in the ashtray.

"Mum," Will blushed, shaking his head as Hannibal's attention turned to him. Hannibal looked like the last thing he wanted to do was thank Will for anything.

"Why is that?" Hannibal asked curiously.

"He likes to fish," his father said, voice affectionate. "He caught the trout we're about to eat this afternoon."

Hannibal's eyebrows shot up, and he slid his eyes over Will almost judgmentally. "You don't look like the kind of boy that enjoys fishing."

Will bristled, watching as he flaked the fish with his fork to press it into his mouth with a sigh of pleasure. "What kind of boy *do* I look like, then?" he asked boldly.

Hannibal said nothing, but his eyes flicked to Will now and again for the rest of their dinner.

The next day was raring up to be a scorcher. Hannibal and his dad were busy in the study, so he changed into his bathing suit and went down by the pool. Well, it wasn't so much a pool as it was a large trough that was no longer used as a fresh water source, but… it served its purpose. The rock walls around it were moss-covered and cool, and the trough was wide enough that when Will braced his arms against one side, his feet could touch the rockface against the other.

The water was cool and refreshing at least, as it was fed by underground springs that breached the rock bottom of the trough. He floated on his back, eyes closed while letting the sun beat down on him.

"Is this the pool?" Hannibal mused.

Will blinked his eyes open in surprise, coming to his feet to glance up at Hannibal, who stood on the rock wall surrounding the trough. “It’s water, and it’s cool. It’s a pool if you squint.”

His eyes slid down Hannibal’s body slowly, taking in every line and crevice of muscle that glinted in the afternoon sunlight. He was the very definition of masculine beauty. Even his chest hair was dark and soft against his muscled chest. His bathing suit shorts did nothing to hide any bit of him, and Will swallowed when his eyes settled on the swell of his soft cock beneath his red shorts.

Hannibal jumped into the pool immediately, and Will immediately retreated by hopping up onto the rock wall surrounding the trough. He watched Hannibal do a few small laps, coming to his feet while swiping water from his face. “It is refreshing,” he agreed. “Regardless of the possibility of Legionella.”

“You speak Italian?” Will asked, grimacing while looking down at himself. He was every inch a teenage boy, still. Too lean. Too wiry. Not a bit of chest hair on him, and he doubted there ever would be. He had armpit hair, but… no chest hair. No bulging pectorals like Hannibal’s. He doubted there ever would be for that, too.

“Yes,” Hannibal said, floating on his back the way that Will had just been. “I attended the University of Rome, and before that I was sent to a boarding school here in my youth.”

“In your youth,” Will snorted. “You’re *twenty-five*.”

“And I was twelve when I attended,” Hannibal agreed. “My youth.”

“I thought you were American?”

“Legally, yes,” he said drowsily. “I was born in Lithuania, but… my parents passed when I was young. I went to live with my aunt and uncle in the States when I was six, and I stayed with them until they sent me to boarding school at twelve.”

“So you know Italy,” Will shrugged.

“I have never been to northern Italy,” Hannibal countered. “The dialect here is quite strange for me.”

“I’m…” Will paused, biting his lip. “I’m sorry about your parents.”

“I don’t remember them,” Hannibal shrugged. He came to his feet with a grimace, pulling himself from the pool without turning back.

Will watched him go with a frown before getting back in the pool to cool down his embarrassed blush.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

I'M BACK FROM VACATION!

I couldn't decide between an update or replying to comments, but I thought this would be better appreciated!

More to come soon, darlings!

The following day the house was alive with activity. His parents did this, occasionally. Even when he was small, he never specifically considered the villa as *their* house. It was always… *the* house. The place where friends and family gathered, coming together without reason or even invitation. Their doors were always open to anyone and everyone.

Sometimes Will liked it, sometimes he didn't. He found that the activity was not really welcomed, today. He watched Hannibal play volleyball with his parent's friends and family, the sweat glistening on his golden muscles as he laughed easily with them.

"A lot better looking then the last house guest," Marzia laughed by his side, leaning into him to press a kiss against his bare shoulder while they sat in the grass. It was too hot for clothes, and mostly everyone was in their bathing suits, Will included.

"He knows it, though," he sneered, watching Hannibal hug his cousin and lift her from the ground after she'd spiked the ball for a point. "*Arrogante*."

Something suspiciously like jealousy was crawling up his throat while watching the easy comradery between Hannibal and his family, and he stood abruptly to head for the shade of the lime tree nearby. There was a cold bottle of water there, as well a fresh bowl of fruit. He grabbed the water bottle, heading back to his girlfriend and her friends to offer them a sip.

The bottle was snatched out of his hand before he passed it off, and he glanced in surprise as Hannibal took a deep pull from it, some of the water escaping his mouth to trail down the column of his throat.

The way he wrapped his lips around the bottle felt obscene, and for a brief moment, Will thought about what it would feel like if Hannibal did that to his cock.

He passed the water bottle back to Will, who took it with numb fingers when Hannibal rested his arm around Will's shoulders, giving his neck a firm squeeze. "Oh *my*," he said in wonder, moving behind Will's shocked body to dig his fingers into the muscles of his back. "You're made of knots, Will."

Probing fingers worked into his shoulder and neck, working the knots free.

He could smell the sweat on the other man and feel the way his fingers slid through the sweat on his own back and neck. His mind was still stuck on the idea that his cock would look good in Hannibal's mouth, and his cock filled rapidly in his shorts. He jerked away from his touch immediately, afraid that he'd have a raging erection in the middle of a family gathering.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," Hannibal sighed, biting his lip while looking away.

"You didn't," Will said awkwardly, rolling his shoulder where the phantom touch from Hannibal still lingered. It felt like static; like raw electricity when their skin met.

Hannibal reached out again, working his fingers into Will's muscles gently. "Let me help you," he offered. "I am going to be a doctor, after all. You need to relax."

The fingers against his skin were causing a fire in him, and he shivered. "I *am* relaxed," he argued weakly, fighting his body's reaction as best he could.

"You're stiff as a board and made of knots," Hannibal chuckled. He felt his breath stir his curls at the nape of his neck, and Will closed his eyes. "Marzia, come here, please."

Will's eyes blinked open in surprise as he felt her delicate fingers press against his back at Hannibal's request. "Feel this? So tense. He needs to relax more."

"You need to relax," Marzia agreed, leaning forward to press a kiss against his shoulder.

Chiara giggled from the picnic table behind them. "*She* knows how to get him to relax," she teased.

Will's blush crept right up his face, and he yanked himself away from the dual, awkward massage he was getting. Hannibal finally took the damned hint and returned to the game, this time with Chiara in tow.

Chiara had just turned nineteen, slightly older than the rest of them, but absolutely beautiful. She'd only gotten more beautiful as she lost her child-like features, venturing into womanhood with flawless perfection. Three years ago, she'd chased Will around all summer, vying for his attention desperately. She was beautiful then, too, but Will... he just never felt that way about her.

Because he'd snubbed her that summer, they hadn't precisely gotten along since then. She constantly had a barbed word or two for him, and he generally pretended she didn't exist. Much like he did three years ago, if he were to be honest.

He watched Hannibal resume the game, this time with Chiara nearby, teasing and touching him occasionally. He honestly didn't feel like watching it, so he abandoned the crowd and went off on his own.

He sat under the shade of the lime tree, his back turned to the volleyball game completely. His neck was still thrumming from Hannibal's touch, and without realizing it, he reached up to grip the spot with his own fingers.

His mother and Mafalda were setting the table nearby for dinner when Mafalda asked, “Is Hannibal staying for dinner tonight?”

His mother shrugged. “Who knows?”

He felt disgustingly sweaty, so he headed upstairs to get ready before dinner. He took a long shower, then stood in front of the mirror with a towel around his waist, sweeping shaving cream over his top lip. Other boys his age already had beards and facial hair, but it wasn’t coming in for Will. He had a bit of hair on his chin, and sparce hairs on his upper lip, but otherwise…

Otherwise, he was as pretty as a girl. Or so he’d been told by Marzia as well as a few of his friends.

He shaved the few hairs on his face, grimacing at how slender and slight he was. After wiping his mouth of shaving cream, he flexed his chest in the mirror, wincing as absolutely nothing happened aside from bones shifting beneath too-pale skin.

There was no bulge of attractive muscle. There was no inherent masculinity.

He closed his eyes, recalling the way the water droplets cascaded down Hannibal’s body. The way they shifted course because they’d encountered chest hair and rolling muscles.

A drop of water would course right down his chest. There was nothing to alter its course on his body. Pre-ripe. *Praecoquum*. Premature.

No wonder Hannibal didn't notice him.

He got changed into a button-down shirt and shorts, rolling the sleeves up to his elbows as he headed down for dinner. Guests were already settled at their seats while his mother and Mafalda bustled around the table, filling wine glasses. “Mafalda,” his mother said, glancing pointedly at Hannibal’s vacant seat. “Take away his setting, would you?”

“Is he not having dinner, then?”

“No,” his mother replied, glancing around to see if he was still on the property. He wasn't. Will felt his absence like a missing limb. “I don’t think he is.”

Hannibal went out, as he often did without even a word to anyone about where he was going. Chiara was still here at least, so wherever he went, it was alone.

Or with someone else entirely. The thought caused a pang in him.

He watched, fighting the urge to stop Mafalda from taking away his place setting, then frowned as food was placed in front of him.

Hannibal's empty space felt like a chasm.

"Do you think it's rude when he doesn't say a thing about what he's doing?" Will asked, glaring at his empty space, then his parents.

"Rude?" his mother repeated doubtfully. "No, *Caro*. I think he's American."

"I think Hannibal is shy," his father interjected. "Not rude so much as… shy."

It wasn't something Will had considered. He glanced around at all the random people having dinner with them and debated the truth in it. Will didn't even specifically like it when the house was bustling like this, and he knew these people. If Hannibal was shy, then… well, all these people would certainly be a deterrent. "Well, we have him for five more weeks," his mother sighed.

"I'm telling you," his father smiled. "He's just shy. You'll both grow to like him."

"What if I grow to hate him?" Will wondered.

"*Caro*," his mother said, chastising him with a shake of her head.

"Will," his father added, making him shrink into his seat further.

He nibbled at his dinner, watching the side gate for Hannibal's return. He was distracted from the meal, barely present as Marzia teased him and held his hand under the table.

Marzia left after the sun set, and the party moved inside to the living area where his father asked him to play the piano for their guests. "I don't want to," he sighed, silently despising when his father did this to him.

"Don't be rude," his father argued. "People like to hear you play, so you'll play for them. Won't you, Will?"

With a deep sigh, he moved to the piano and began playing. He played the piece solemnly, like a pianist would if requested to play for the last time before he was executed. The hairs on his neck stood on end as he played, and he turned to find Hannibal leaning against the threshold of the opened French doors, his eyes burning hot against Will's back.

The way he played the piece changed without his awareness, his fingers weaving their longing into each note as he played it. Chiara went to Hannibal, and he heard her hushed whispers as she spoke to him, though he couldn't hear what was being said. Her tone and body language implied flirtation, and Hannibal's expression in turn looked slightly less than interested.

His eyes kept lifting to over Chiara's shoulder, his heavy gaze on Will and Will alone. He felt it like a physical caress, though he couldn't exactly understand it. Hannibal generally didn't show interest in him, but he was looking.

A stray thought occurred to him, and he wondered if Hannibal was looking because Will was… awkward looking. Maybe he was looking because he couldn't understand why anyone asked him to play in the first place.

He finished the piece, then retreated to his room for the night.

The next morning, Will woke up very early because it was already sweltering in his bedroom. His skin was stuck to his bedsheets, and he shifted uncomfortably while glancing at the opened bedroom window. There was no breeze at all, nothing to break the suffocating heat already blooming in the early morning dawn.

He changed into his bathing suit and crept out through the shared bathroom, but not before peeking in on Hannibal in his room. He was sleeping, bare chest exposed with nothing but a thin sheet wrapped around his waist. Will licked his lips while watching him, taking in the strong curve of his bicep. The delicate arch of his foot where it stuck out from the white sheet.

With a thick swallow, he headed downstairs to go for a swim.

After cooling down at the trough, he had breakfast with his parents and Hannibal, then went off under the shade of a tree to strum his guitar. The study windows were open, and he could hear his father and Hannibal discussing his manuscript. "I think your insights here are persuasive, but…" his father sighed.

"Go on," Hannibal encouraged, hands on his hips. "I can take criticism."

"Can you?" his father smiled. "Good. This needs… firming up. Homer provides the details in the poem. What you need is to explore the text. Not just… explain it."

"Back to the drawing board," Hannibal sighed, pacing the study with his paper clasped in his hand.

"Did you have fun with Chiara last night?" his dad asked with a knowing smile.

"A great time," Hannibal smiled. "She's a wonderful girl."

Will scowled, taking his guitar to his room to put it away.

He went back to the trough afterwards, lounging in a lawn chair to soak in the late afternoon sun. Hannibal had come over at some point, his notebook clasped in his hands while he worked on his manuscript in silence. Will didn't mind that so much, as the heat made him tired, and he dozed in and out. He felt at peace knowing where Hannibal was, even if the man generally didn't pay him any attention whatsoever.

“Are you sleeping?” Hannibal asked.

Will startled at the abrupt break in silence, sitting up in the lawn chair with a stretch. “Not anymore.”

“Come here, please,” he requested, feet dangling into the trough. “Listen to this drivel and tell me if it makes any sense to you.”

Will came to the edge of the trough hesitantly, standing by Hannibal’s side as he shook his head down at his paper. He was wearing his red bathing suit, and it did absolutely nothing to hide any bit of him. “The immortals are not confused with the reality whose manifestations they help to explain in rational terms. They never usurp the primary role of death, although it may temporarily become incarnate in them. However, in particular context, and in general effect, they symbolize the antagonist in life, man’s arch enemy.”

Will waited for him to continue, but he paused. “Does that make any sense to you? It doesn’t make any sense to your father.”

Of all the people Hannibal could ask, he asked Will. There was a little burning ember of pride in him over it, and he shrugged as nonchalantly as he could. “Maybe it made sense to you when you wrote it.”

Hannibal glanced up at him in surprise, his amber eyes sweeping over his bare chest, then his throat before settling on his face. “That might just be the kindest thing anyone’s said to me in months.”

Will blinked at him, biting his bottom lip in disbelief. “*Kind*?” he repeated.

“Yes,” Hannibal sighed. “Kind.”

With that revelation, he sprawled out across the rock wall, stretching his muscles while setting his manuscript aside. Will watched every ripple of movement under his skin. The way his sweat made his chest hair glisten.

With no warning, Hannibal rolled himself into the pool, and sank under the water. He was a strange man, Will mused. Strange.

Intriguing.

As the sun began to drift behind the tall trees, they headed back to the orchard. Will took out his music sheets and attempted to transcribe some music, but… his thoughts were scattered. Hannibal’s nearness sent his mind in a spin, and he couldn’t concentrate on anything other than the sound of his voice as he spoke to his mother and Mafalda.

“Will!” he said brightly, hoisting himself onto the picnic table where Will was trying to work. The scent of him was sweat, coconut sunscreen, and expensive cologne, and Will avoided looking at him at all costs. “What are you doing?”

“Reading my music,” Will said dismissively.

“No you’re not,” Hannibal laughed, and he heard his mother laugh behind him, too.

“Thinking, then,” Will said evasively.

“What about?” Hannibal asked, reaching out to touch the corner of his sheet music. No doubt trying to get Will to look up at him, too.

“Private,” he blurted fiercely.

“So that means you’re not going to tell me?” He could practically hear the pout in Hannibal’s voice.

“I am not going to tell you,” Will said agreeably, ignoring him to the best of his ability.

“He’s not going to tell me,” Hannibal laughed, possibly speaking to his mother. “Well in that case, I’m going into the orchard with Elisabeth.”

Will watched as Hannibal drifted off into the trees with his mother, taking her fruit basket from her hands. Hannibal climbed a wooden ladder, reaching up into the apricot tree to cut some fruit. “Which ones are ripe?” he asked, tossing a glance down to his mom who stood by his side.

“Pick the ones that are almost blushing in shame,” she laughed.

This earned her a gravelly, deep, rumble of laugher in response, and Will felt sick that he’d never made Hannibal laugh like that. “This one?” he asked, pointing to a fruit that Will couldn’t see from where he was sitting. The sun was shining down on Hannibal like the clouds parted for him alone.

“No,” she laughed. “Too young. Youth has no shame. Shame comes with age.”

Another rumble of laughter echoed while he turned to reach up into the tree again. Every inch of him was utter perfection.

He had his tight red bathing suit bottoms on. They curved around his bottom like a second skin, and each shift he made while reaching up into the apricot tree made his ass jiggle.

Without conscious thought, his legs were moving. His mother handed him the fruit basket with a thankful kiss before wandering away to help Anchise with the peaches two rows over from them. Hannibal made a little grunt of effort, his eyes raised while one hand held a branch and the other offered a fruit down to Will’s outstretched fingers.

Hannibal glanced down in surprise as their fingers made contact, the feel of their skin touching absolutely electric. Without looking, Hannibal knew it was Will who was taking the fruit from his hands. He knew because he felt it, too.

They made eye contact for a breathless moment before Hannibal turned back to the tree, returning to his task with a singular focus. Hannibal handed him a perfectly ripe apricot, and

Will dragged his finger against the dimple of the fruit distractedly. His eyes flicked up to Hannibal's ass again, and…

Will wanted to take a bite out of it. Sink his teeth right in and suck a bruise there. "Will?" he called.

Will raised his eyes from his apricot bottom, a heated flush on his cheeks. "What?"

"Here," he laughed, motioning for Will to take the few apricots he'd picked. Will hadn't realized as his mind was decidedly elsewhere. He took the fruit slowly, making sure their fingers brushed every time he reached up.

Apricot. His mind drifted to Hannibal's lecture on his first full day here. Apricot. Apricock. Pre-cock. *Praecoquum*.

Premature. Which was how Will felt in his presence. Not ready.

Too young. He grimaced while taking the next fruit, intentionally dragging his fingers against Hannibal's inner wrist. The older man shivered, flashing his eyes down at Will in warning.

He didn't care so much. The youth had no shame, after all.

Marzia called him that afternoon to tell him they were all heading to the lake for a swim, but he declined. His hand still felt like static from where he and Hannibal had touched as he passed fruit to him from the tree, their eyes making contact occasionally.

He felt wound up, and he needed a way to expel it.

He crept up to his bedroom, heading to his temporary bed to lay on it. The house was mostly silent aside from the bustle of activity from downstairs, and Will swallowed thickly while reaching into his bathing suit.

Closing his eyes, he recalled the way Hannibal's muscles glinted when wet. The way the water sluiced over his body, matting his chest hair. He recalled the way his bathing suit stuck to him, emphasizing his cock perfectly in his red bathing suit.

He thought about that little sliver of toned belly that peeked out every time he reached up into the tree. The way his red shorts molded around his ass, emphasizing how lush it was. How perfectly fucking ripe it would be to bite into it.

His own cock throbbed in his hand, and he stroked it slowly, trying his best to savor the way his whole body was lit up with pleasure. He smeared the pre-come on the head of his cock, gliding it down the length of it while gripping himself firmly.

The door to his bathroom banged open, and he jumped as Hannibal stalked into his room without announcing himself. As quick as he was about removing his hand, he *knew* Hannibal saw what he'd been doing. He drew his knees up to hide his erection, curling in on himself in embarrassment. "Why aren't you at the lake with everyone else?" he asked.

Will blushed, his breathing coming quicker with being caught. “I’m… I have… Um. I have an allergy,” he said stupidly.

“Me too,” Hannibal chuckled, sliding his eyes over Will’s curled up form. “I think we have the same one.”

Will shrugged noncommittally, avoiding eye contact like the plague. “How about we go for a swim?” Hannibal asked. “Just the two of us.”

“Later, maybe,” Will pleaded, trying desperately to get his cock to calm down. Hannibal was here in his room, shirtless, while Will was sporting a raging erection. The things he wanted in that moment had nothing to do with a swim at all.

“Now,” Hannibal countered, reaching for Will’s hand to pull him up from the bed. The same hand that had just been on his cock. The familiar electric current arced between them, and he felt his cock pulse as he *came* in his fucking bathing suit.

His face flamed as Hannibal tugged him up into a sitting position, his eyes sliding over Will knowingly. He took a deep inhale, his head tilted curiously. There was no fucking way he smelled it, but it certainly seemed like he did. “I’ll meet you downstairs, then?”

Will blushed, avoiding eye contact as he nodded.

Hannibal left his bedroom, and Will groaned while reaching into his bathing suit, finding a sticky mess there with a grimace. “Stupid,” he bemoaned. “So fucking *stupid*.”

He stood from the bed, reaching distractedly for a clean bathing suit while tugging his ruined one down his legs. As he tugged them on, he headed through the bathroom, stalling out when he realized that Hannibal’s bathroom door was wide open.

Hannibal stood at the side of the bed, stunningly naked while changing from his red bathing suit into his beige one. Will gawked, trailing his eyes over the firm globes of Hannibal’s ass as he tugged the material up his legs, then his side profile as he tucked his cock into them. “Ready?” Hannibal asked, glancing at Will knowingly.

Will nodded, and Hannibal smiled while heading out with him.

As they came down the stairs, they bumped into Chiara and Marzia who were on their way up to find them. “There you are!” Marzia chirped. “You’re coming swimming! No refusing!”

Chiara had a scrap of wine-red material in her hand, and she passed it off to Hannibal. “Join us,” she implored, eyes scraping over Hannibal from head to toe. He took his button-down with a smile, fluffing the wrinkled material out.

How Chiara even had his shirt, he didn’t want to know.

“Take it with you,” Chiara said, touching Hannibal’s shoulder. “We’re going dancing afterwards.”

“Is it yours?” Marzia asked with a raised eyebrow. “It was in the study downstairs.”

Will breathed a sigh of relief as Hannibal nodded before turning to Will. “We’re going dancing afterwards,” he smiled.

“Let me get a shirt, then,” he sighed.

He had been looking forward to an afternoon with Hannibal alone. Chiara and Marzia made that impossible, though. Marzia demanded his attention at the lake, and Chiara was decidedly completely all over Hannibal, not that it looked like he minded all that much.

There was an outdoor pub down the road from the lake, and they headed there with damp bathing suits and squishing flip-flops as the sun set. The cobblestone street became a dance floor, and Will sipped his wine while watching Hannibal dance with Chiara in the street.

His wine tasted like acid. She was pressed against him in every way she could be, her tiny little dress highlighting her every curve where his large hands held her against him. The music was upbeat, but their dance was sensual. They’d be fucking if they had less clothes on, and Will tried to contain the flare of jealousy scorching his gut.

“He’s lucky,” his cousin remarked from behind him after a pull on his cigarette.

Marzia took the cigarette from his fingers with a laugh, taking a drag herself. “It’s arguable that she’s pretty damned lucky, too.”

“You think he’s fucking her?” his cousin laughed.

“I don’t care,” Will blurted, chugging his wine down to the last drop.

Marzia watched him knowingly for a moment, lacing her fingers with his. “Dance with me,” she said softly.

He nodded, then headed out on the dancefloor with her, coming close to where Hannibal and Chiara were dancing. Marzia was a beautiful girl, and he tried his best to pay attention to her instead of Hannibal, who was gyrating against Chiara suggestively.

He watched in dismay as Hannibal and Chiara walked off together, her arm around his waist as they abandoned the rest of the gang without a word. He tugged Marzia close, whispering against her ear. “Come for a swim with me?”

She pulled away in surprise and nodded her head.

The lake was illuminated by moonlight as they stripped back down to their bathing suits. All he could think about was how Hannibal was likely buried deep inside of Chiara at this moment, her undeserving fingers touching all of his bare skin. He tugged Marzia close, pressing kisses against her throat. “Are you with me right now because you want to be, or because you’re angry about Chiara?”

Will leaned away from her neck, his fingers trailing over her bare spine under her bikini top. “Why would I be angry with Chiara?” he asked.

“Because of him,” she said knowingly.

He shook his head immediately, thankful for the cover of darkness that hid his blush.

She went swimming with him, but… there was something off. She knew, and he *knew* she knew. It made him embarrassed, but not for the reasons it should. If Marzia knew how he felt about Hannibal, then there was no way that Hannibal didn’t know, too.

It mortified him and distracted him throughout his swim. As they stood by the lake to dry off, he took Marzia’s hand to press a kiss to her palm. “Meet me here tomorrow?” he asked. “Seven?”

He needed to get over Hannibal. His mercurial moods were giving Will whiplash, and he struggled to remember that Hannibal was only here for another five weeks. Once he left, Will would be alone again. Things would return to normal. Pre-Hannibal. As they were before he got here and uprooted Will's life with his red bathing suit and his alpine cheekbones. He'd have... Marzia and his books. His parents and his music. He could touch people without that little zing of something that passed through his body whenever he touched Hannibal. He wanted it. Wanted Hannibal to go away, already.

"At seven," she agreed, smiling shyly while going to her tiptoes to press a kiss to his cheek.

Soon, Hannibal would be gone. He wanted it.

Even if it made his stomach ache just thinking about it.

Chapter 4

The next morning, Hannibal came to breakfast looking somewhat worse for wear. He looked tired and rumpled. Hungover and… relaxed, somehow. The visual incited Will, who turned to his father before his mother got to the table. “I almost made love to Marzia last night,” he stated, glancing pointedly at Hannibal who went still at the announcement.

The relationship he had with his father was unlike most people, and in this moment, he was glad for it. “Why didn’t you?” his dad asked with a laugh.

“Don’t know,” he shrugged, taking his four-minute egg to crack it open.

“Better to have tried and failed,” his father went on.

“All I had to do was find the courage to reach out and touch,” Will shrugged. “She would have said yes.”

“Try again later,” Hannibal suggested, mouth pursed tight while he cracked his own egg open effortlessly.

“Try what again?” his mother asked, glaring between the three of them.

“Nothing,” Will laughed.

“I just heard from the people in Sirmione, they say they’ve come up with something. I’m going there today, if you would you like to go with me?” his father asked Hannibal.

“I’d like that very much,” Hannibal agreed pleasantly.

“Can I go, too?” Will asked.

“Of course, Caro,” his father smiled, leaning forward to ruffle his hair.

Just as they were getting ready to head off, Chiara rolled up on her bike. “Is Hannibal here?” she asked brightly.

Will gestured to the house while leaning against the car. “We’re going to Lake Garda with dad. He wants to show Hannibal where they’re dredging.”

She looked put out by that, her shoulders slumping. “Tell him I came by?”

“He’s inside helping dad,” he replied with a nod. He paused, taking in her sunny yellow dress and her dark hair. “You looked good on the dancefloor last night.”

“He’s a good dancer,” she agreed with a blush.

“He’s good looking, too, isn’t he?” Will pressed, watching the blush creep up her cheeks.

“You trying to set us up?” she giggled.

He shrugged, tugging his sunglasses on as his dad and Hannibal came out of the house. He watched Chiara leave the driveway, and he watched as Hannibal watched her go, too.

Anchise was cleaning the windshield of the car, so Hannibal climbed into the backseat with Will. Their bare legs brushed in the confines of the car, and Will contained the shiver. “Chiara likes you a lot. She’s gotten more beautiful every year.”

Hannibal shot him a look he couldn’t read before glancing down to where their knees were touching. “I saw her body on a night swim once,” Will went on. “She’s… gorgeous.”

“Are you trying to make me like her?” Hannibal asked pointedly, mouth pursed in what Will assumed was annoyance.

“What would be the harm in that?” he wondered.

“No harm,” Hannibal sighed. “Except I like to go at it alone. I don’t need you to play the good host by setting me up, okay?”

Will shriveled in the seat, chastised as his dad spoke with Anchise in Italian. “I’ll drive myself this afternoon, Anchise,” he said with a smile. “Take the afternoon off!” He turned to Hannibal and gestured to the front seat. “Come sit up front, Hannibal. You’re my navigator today.”

Will mourned the loss of him by his side, his leg cold and bereft the moment he left the backseat.

The drive to the lake was long in the startling heat of the day. Even with all the windows open, it was still blisteringly hot. He watched Hannibal from the backseat, an opened map spread across his thighs. A drop of sweat came free from his hairline, and he watched as it slid down his tanned neck, into the hem of his blue tee shirt.

He couldn’t see his face from the backseat, but the profile of the side of his face was still striking. His cheekbone was highlighted with sweat, the light refracting off the sharp lines of his face beautifully. He was a work of art, that much was certain.

They got to the site early, archaeologists milling around something on the shoreline of the lake, talking animatedly. “The ship went down in 1827 on the way to the villa of Count Lechi here on this island,” his father said to Hannibal with a wide smile. The archaeologists showed them the arm of a statue nestled into a rubber swimsuit to protect it. It was bronze, but covered in moss and sea life.

His father marched off to speak with other people from the crew, as they were bringing something else that they'd found to shore. He and Hannibal stood side by side, elbows brushing while waiting for the reveal.

A bronze statue was brought ashore, his left arm missing. The statue was that of a boxer, naked. His body was chiseled and perfect, even despite the marine-life clinging to its surface. "Why did we only find him now?" Will asked his father.

"A good question," his father said proudly, ruffling his hair affectionately. "His partner - they're a pair - is in the Vatican. There are four known sets, after the Praxiteles originals. This fellow is number three. The Emperor Hadrian had a pair, dug up at Tivoli, but one of the more philistine of the Farnese popes melted them down and had them recast as a particularly voluptuous Venus that was traded to Napoleon later on."

"Guess they didn't need two pairs," Hannibal mused.

"No," his father agreed, completely delighted by their find. The sun had began setting, and he gestured to the water. "Who wants to go for a swim before we head back?"

Hannibal and Will exchanged a smile, then shucked their tee shirts to head into the water. There was still some lingering awkwardness between them, and Will wanted to fix it. He waded over to Hannibal, who was standing gloriously bare-chested and waist deep in the lapping waves. "Truce?" he offered, extending his hand for a shake.

Hannibal smiled, sliding his eyes from Will's hand, up his arm, then to his face. "We're good," he promised, taking Will's hand in his own.

The current between them arced, and Hannibal hissed while dragging him close. There was a brief moment where Will was certain he was going to be kissed, but firm hands gripped his waist before throwing him into the waves.

He scrambled to the surface, an indignant laugh bubbling out of him. "Jerk!" he wailed, jumping on Hannibal's back in an attempt to drown him.

Hannibal laughed brightly, dropping his body beneath the waves with Will clung to his back, legs wrapped around his waist. Firm hands gripped his thigh under the water, shifting him around until he was clasped to Hannibal's chest. They play-fought in the waves, each taking liberties that could be hidden by their play-fight.

He touched Hannibal's chest, marveling at the firmness of his skin under the thatch of chest chair. Hannibal's hands splayed wide on his stomach, thumbs brushing over his ribcage in exploration.

It was over too soon, his father calling them from the shoreline so they could head home for the day.

They didn't get back to the villa until late, and Will jolted as he remembered that he was supposed to meet Marzia at the lake by the villa at seven.

It was well past that, now.

The moment the car came to a stop, he leapt from the backseat. “Gotta go!” he announced, running to his bike to head off.

By the time he got to the lake, the only thing that was there were crickets. Marzia was long, long, gone.

The heat broke the next day with a thunderstorm that rocked the villa, dropping a deluge over the orchard. The scent of ozone and damp grass filtered in through the opened windows, bringing in dampness that made Will shiver. The lights flickered with the passing storm, and there wasn’t much to do when the weather was like this.

So, as was his new hobby, he went in search of Hannibal.

His room was empty, which meant that he’d braved the storm to go out for the day. He couldn’t imagine where he’d have gone, though his mind supplied that he was likely buried inside of Chiara.

His eyes settled on Hannibal’s red swim shorts that were hung on the headboard of the bed, and he crept over to them hesitantly, closing the door behind himself. He picked them up slowly, glancing around the empty space as if trying to decide whether or not he’d be caught.

There was no one around.

He brought the fabric to his nose without thought, inhaling the scent of sweat and cologne from the material greedily. His cock twitched and filled in his shorts, and he palmed himself distractedly while turning the fabric of his trunks inside out. *This is what he smells like*, he thought. It was a mantra in his head as he nuzzled his face into the material.

There was a mesh material inside, where Hannibal’s cock was held when he’d wear them. He pressed the mesh against his nose, inhaling the scent of musk from the fabric while removing his own shorts. He licked the material curiously, a whimper escaping him at the realization that it didn’t taste like anything other than fabric. No Hannibal to be found.

He slid the swim trunks over his legs, cupping his cock in the mesh cage, palming his erection in the material. He dropped onto the bed, pressing his face into his pillow that now smelled like nothing but Hannibal’s sweat and cologne, a guttural moan scraping from his throat as he inhaled the scent hungrily.

This is what Hannibal smelled like. Sweat. Spicy cologne. Shampoo that smelled of sandalwood and cedar.

He reached down, cupping his throbbing cock in the shorts while inhaling Hannibal’s scent from the pillow. It felt so fucking good that Will shifted against the bed, rocking his cock against the mattress desperately.

The mesh cupped him and held him like a hand, his cock pressed intimately against the very spot where Hannibal's own naked cock would have been. It was a heady thought, and he whined while fucking himself against the mattress, hips shifting as he bit at Hannibal's pillow.

The rain had stopped at some point, and he heard the distinct squeak of bike tires braking outside the window. He stood abruptly, heading to the window to watch as Hannibal dismounted the bike, shaking out his rain-soaked hair.

He blanched and stripped out of the shorts quickly, straightening out the bed and pillow as best he could before snatching his own shorts from the floor. He dashed to his room, naked, closing the door quietly just as Hannibal entered the bedroom. He heard him moving around, and got dressed as quietly as he could.

It was silent for a few tense moments while Will's heart rabbited in his chest. The sun came out, blinding and bright in its intensity, though the air was cooler after the passing storm.

There was a tentative knock at his bedroom door, and Will held his breath while opening it slowly.

The red swim trunks were now at the foot of the bed, the material turned inside out as if Hannibal somehow fucking knew what he'd done. The pillow he'd had pressed against his face was rumpled, moved off from where Will had put it. Hannibal watched him with eyes that burned like embers. "I have to head into town," he said, voice like gravel. "I tried to go this morning, but I got caught in a deluge and had to wait it out in a café. Would you join me?"

Will swallowed thickly, glancing away from his intense gaze to look at the swim shorts. "Now?" he asked weakly.

"Now," he agreed.

Will wanted to ask him how he knew. He wanted to ask him why he'd come get him after he knew, but he couldn't get the words out.

Instead, he followed Hannibal out of the room numbly, the shorts turned out and obviously investigated.

They took the bikes to the only place in town that had a fax machine, and he waited while Hannibal went inside to send off another few pages of his manuscript to his publisher.

When Hannibal rejoined him outside, they walked around the Piave Memorial statute, keeping careful distance from one another. "World War II? Did the allies fight near here?" Hannibal wondered.

"This is World War I," Will replied, eyes on the memorial. "You'd have to be eighty to know any of them. It was one of the biggest battles that happened in World War I. A hundred and seventy thousand people died."

Hannibal watched him pridefully, licking his lips while tilting his head. “Is there anything you don’t know?”

“I know nothing, Hannibal,” he sighed. “You’d be amazed how much I don’t know about the things that matter.”

“What things that matter?” he asked softly, coming to Will’s side. This close, Will could smell him. Clean sweat and spicy cologne.

“You *know* what things,” Will said accusingly. “By now, you of *all* people should know.”

Hannibal swallowed thickly, glancing away from Will for a moment. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I thought you should know,” he shrugged.

Hannibal’s eyes flicked back to him, his gaze heavy again. “You thought I should know.”

“Because I *want* you to know,” he clarified, fighting the blush that worked its way up his neck. “Because there’s no one else I can talk to about this aside from you.”

Hannibal’s fingers brushed his forearm, his head tilted enough that he was in Will’s space. “Are you saying what I think you’re saying?” he asked softly.

“Yes,” Will breathed, inching himself closer.

Hannibal blinked, pulling himself away from Will with a frown. Will’s blood felt like there was lightning in it, his entire body buzzing with energy that had no where to go. “They mixed up my pages,” he said suddenly, making Will blink at the change of topic. “I have to retype the whole thing. It’ll set me back a whole day.”

The change in topic was on purpose. Will knew it, just as he knew Hannibal would avoid the discussion. “I wish I’d never said anything to you.”

“I’m going to pretend you never did,” Hannibal agreed, stepping away from him entirely.

Will felt the loss of him in his bones, and he worried over whether what he’d said would push Hannibal away from him. “Does this mean we’re only on speaking terms… but not really?”

Hannibal sighed, swiping his jawline with his fingers. “I can’t…” he grimaced, trailing his eyes over Will from head to toe. “Will, I can’t. You and I can’t talk about… things like that. We just can’t. You know it, too.”

With that, Hannibal turned and walked away, kicking his bike stand up. “Do you have plans?” he asked softly, heading to his own bike that was next to Hannibal’s.

“I should get back and work on my manuscript,” Hannibal replied.

Will turned to him with a frown, sliding his eyes over him slowly. “I want to show you something.”

Hannibal closed his eyes for a moment, his hands gripping the handles of the bike until he went white-knuckled. “Will,” he breathed.

“Please?” he said softly, reaching out without thought to touch his knuckles.

The shiver that went through Hannibal was palpable, and he nodded. Albeit, hesitantly. “Lead the way.”

Will beamed, grabbing his bike before touching Hannibal’s shoulder. “Follow me!” he laughed, hopping on his bike to pedal madly down the cobblestone street.

He heard Hannibal’s vibrant laugh behind him, the distance between them closing as they raced down the street. Cobblestone turned into gravel, then to dirt as they left the town behind. Wide-open fields greeted them; the gentle summer winds cool against their faces after the passing storm.

They pulled up to the spring pools, Hannibal taking a moment to catch his breath. There was no one out this far from the town, the natural spring pools utterly deserted. “This is my spot,” Will said proudly, ditching his bike to wade into the shallow springs. “Tourists don’t know about this place, and the locals don’t usually come out this far. I come here to read. To think. To be alone.”

It was the truth, too. He’d never brought anyone here aside from Hannibal. By bringing him here, he was sharing a part of himself that he’d never shared with anyone else. Sharing a private space that was his alone, and now it was *theirs*. He wanted it to be theirs, even long after Hannibal went home.

“It’s beautiful,” Hannibal said softly, though his eyes were on Will, and not the vast mountain ranges around them as he said it. He kicked off his loafers, wading into the shallow, clear, water with a hiss. “It’s freezing!”

“The spring is in the mountains, the Alpi Orobie. The water comes straight down from there,” Will said, gesturing up at the snow-capped mountains in the distance. Will turned back to Hannibal, watching him scoop the cool water in his hands before rinsing his face with it.

Water dripped down his face, following the strong curve of his throat. His cheekbones stood out in sharp relief, endlessly beautiful in their severity. He continued rinsing his face with the water, standing in the shade of one of the surrounding Willow trees. “Do you like being alone?” he asked, watching Will closely.

“No one likes being alone,” Will replied bitterly. “When you first stepped into the spring pool, the icy sting of it shocked you, right?” Hannibal licked the water from his lips, then nodded. “That’s what loneliness is like. It stings, at first. Then you just… go numb to it. You don’t notice it after a while.”

“Are you always so wise, Will?” he asked softly.

“Not wise,” Will replied, dipping down to wet his own face with the icy water. “I told you already. I know nothing. I know books, and I know how to string words together. It doesn’t

mean I know how to speak about the things- about the things that matter most to me."

"You're doing it now," Hannibal mused, wading over to him until they were barely a foot apart. "In a way," he chuckled.

"Yeah," he said derisively. "That's how I always say things; In a way."

"If you're alone, it's because you are unique," he said softly, each turning to take in the vast mountain range behind them. "Being different from others is a good thing."

"Not in my case," Will replied bitterly. "I come here to escape the known world."

"I like…" Hannibal said cautiously, drawing Will's eyes up to him. "I like how you word things. I don't know why you put yourself down."

"I don't know either," Will shrugged. "So you won't, I guess."

"Are you so scared of what others think?" Hannibal asked softly. Will shook his head, folding his arms around himself protectively. "Of what I think?" he wondered.

Will bit his lip, turning his body away from the mountain range to face Hannibal fully. Hannibal's opinion of him might be the only one that mattered. He watched the way Hannibal's eyes traced over his face, his chest rising and falling with his increased breaths.

Usually, when he would feel Hannibal's eyes on him, he'd avert his own gaze elsewhere. This time, he held eye contact, forcing himself to watch Hannibal in the same way that the beautiful man was watching him. Throughout Will's life, he'd never understood what it felt like to truly want something. To need it with a fierceness that made your stomach feel like acid. He'd never liked anything enough to want it, people included.

He wanted Hannibal, though. He felt… right around him. Good. Like everything that never made sense in his life finally did. He tipped his jaw up, holding Hannibal's scorching gaze. Hannibal shivered, breaking the connection by moving away to the grassy hill to the side of the spring pool. "You're making this difficult for me," he said with a sigh, long fingers coming up to tug through his silken, ash-blonde, hair.

"Why am I making things difficult?" Will asked indignantly, moving out from the water to slump by Hannibal's side.

Hannibal leaned back against his elbows, watching Will with a frown. "Because it would be wrong."

"Would?" Will asked, leaning back on his elbows, too. He turned his body towards Hannibal, delighting when his amber eyes drifted down his torso.

"Yes," he sighed. "Would. I won't pretend that this hasn't crossed my mind."

Will snorted, leaning into Hannibal just a bit. "I'd be the last to know."

"Well it has," Hannibal said bitterly. "What did you *think* was going on?"

“Going on?” Will repeated in confusion. “Nothing, Hannibal. *Nothing* is going on.”

Hannibal shifted onto one elbow, watching Will closely. The pout of his top lip was calling to Will, but he held himself back. “You’ve got it wrong,” he breathed. “If it makes you feel better, I… I have to hold myself back when I’m around you. You should learn to do the same.”

Will went to one elbow, too, mirroring Hannibal’s pose. They were inches apart, now, and Will felt every breath from his lips against his face. “Is it because of my age? Or my family?”

“All of it,” Hannibal replied. He moved closer to Will, his face barely inches from Will’s own. His eyes slid over Will’s features as if memorizing him, and Will held his breath. A gentle finger came up to stroke his jawline, then his cheek. Will’s mouth parted so he could gasp through it, reveling in the electric current passing between them. Hannibal’s eyes burned against his skin, watching raptly as he trailed his finger along Will’s bottom lip.

Will wanted to taste his skin, so he parted his mouth further, licking the pad of Hannibal’s finger. Hannibal groaned, shifting minutely closer as Will wrapped his lips around the digit, sucking his finger gently while rolling his tongue against it in his mouth.

Hannibal withdrew his finger from Will’s mouth, leaning into him with his mouth parted. He stopped half-way, the tension between them rising enough that Will felt it in his bones. He leaned in, too, parting his own mouth in a dare that made Hannibal smile and laugh.

Their noses bumped. Each waited patiently for the other to close the distance, but each resisted. Will didn’t have the patience for it, and he showed it by darting his tongue out, licking Hannibal’s bottom lip, then his top lip, the soft skin lifting with the quick swipe of his tongue.

Hannibal’s shoulders drooped as Will shifted closer, parting his mouth in the exact moment that Hannibal parted his. Their lips met, and Will let the relieved little moan rumble from his throat. The soft sweep of Hannibal’s tongue against his own was sweet and gentle. His lips were petal soft, molding against Will’s with each press of their tongues. Soft fingertips caressed the side of his face, and Will’s cock thickened as the realization that this was *actually* happening settled over him.

This is what he tastes like, he thought while his tongue licked boldly into Hannibal’s mouth. He could smell him, too. Coconut sunscreen, sweat, and spicy cologne. This is what he smelled like. This is how he tasted. The tally marks of what he knew about Hannibal grew, but he still wanted to know more.

Just as he was about to tip his head to deepen the kiss, Hannibal pulled away with a wet smack of their lips. He took a shuddering breath, leaning back on two elbows again. “Better now?” he asked lowly.

Will shifted closer, hovering over Hannibal so he could see his face. “Not yet,” he said softly, leaning in to kiss him again.

Hannibal's mouth parted automatically, and he licked in, moaning at the flavor of him on his tongue. The kiss lasted longer than the first, but still no where near long enough. Hannibal's responsiveness to the second kiss fueled him, and he tried to shift his leg over Hannibal's waist to straddle him, but Hannibal stopped him.

Hannibal pulled away. Again. "We should leave."

"Not yet," Will pleaded. He wanted to know what Hannibal felt like under him. Against him. Thick cock nestled hard and leaking against Will's own. His hips thrust uselessly in the air, and Hannibal rolled back further from him into the long grass.

"We can't do this," Hannibal sighed, licking the remnants of Will's kiss from his lips. "I know myself. So far, we've done nothing to be ashamed of. We've behaved. Let's keep it that way, please. I want to be… good."

"Don't be," Will said softly, leaning in for a kiss as Hannibal moved away. Youth had no shame. Shame came with age. "I don't care, Hannibal. Who's to know?"

Hannibal leaned away further, and in a fit of desperation, Will reached out and grabbed the thick outline of his cock in his shorts. He gripped him fully in his palm, squeezing the hard flesh while feeling his own cock throb in response. *This is what he feels like*, Will marveled, squeezing his turgid flesh in his palm. Hot, hard, and straining.

Hannibal swallowed thickly, resting his hand over Will's, pressing his palm harder against himself before realizing what he was doing. He grasped Will's hand and lifted it away, but not before pressing a kiss to his knuckles.

Will stayed silent in shock, completely in disbelief over his actions while Hannibal stayed silent and unreadable as well. "Did I offend you?"

"Don't," Hannibal pleaded, eyes heavy with regret. "Just… don't."

Hannibal came to his feet and offered his hand for Will to come to his own. Without another word, they rode their bikes back to the villa.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They got back to the villa in time for dinner, not that Will wanted to join his parents. They'd invited an old art historian couple that his mother knew from when she worked at the gallery, and he honestly couldn't stand either of them.

Still, he followed Hannibal to the table, each settling into their seats. Will sat at the head of the table with Hannibal to his immediate left, each awe-struck by how the couple bickered and argued throughout their meal. No one could get a word in edgewise, as their bickering was only halted for long enough for each of them to light a cigarette or sip their wine.

His parents looked patiently accepting of this, but Hannibal looked immensely amused by it, and Will felt himself smiling just as his parents flicked a disapproving look at him.

Dinner plates were replaced by dessert plates by Mafalda, and as she set his ice cream down in front of him, she pressed a kiss to his temple, which made him smile wide up at her.

Hannibal watched it happen, and if Will didn't know better, he'd say the look on his face was almost jealous. He pressed the spoon into his mouth, letting the ice cream melt on his tongue. A warm foot covered his own bare foot under the picnic table, and Will almost choked.

Hannibal had kicked off his loafer and started rubbing the top of Will's foot with his, massaging his toes with the ball of his foot. Even playing footsie with him made his blood pressure go up, and he glanced around the table nervously to see if his parents were paying attention.

They were not. Hannibal's movements were subtle enough that they didn't see it, and they were paying attention to their guests, who were still bickering seemingly with only a need for cigarette smoke or wine to fuel them.

That current was passing through his foot, electricity making his blood feel like it was boiling in his veins. His breathing was coming quicker with the thoughts racing through his head. He wanted to straddle Hannibal in the chair and kiss him until he was blind. He wanted to grind his cock into Hannibal's stomach and find out what his back teeth tasted like.

He wanted those big, strong, hands on his bare skin. He wanted that silken mouth back against his own. On his chest.

He wanted those lips wrapped around his cock.

The foot slid up his leg, teasing him mercilessly while he tried to keep himself under control. He leaned forward to hide the flush on his cheeks, and the wet slap of red against his vanilla ice cream looked like blood.

He glanced up above his head to see where it came from, and he felt the warm trickle slide to his top lip. “Fuck,” he breathed, snatching his napkin to press it against his nose. It had been ages since this had happened, and he was mortified.

Hannibal realized that he was bleeding, and the intense concern on his face made him even more embarrassed. “Excuse me,” Will blurted, coming to his feet quickly to go in the house.

“What happened?” he heard his mother ask.

“He had… a nosebleed,” Hannibal said, voice tinged with anxiety. “Is he alright?”

“It happens when he gets worked up,” his mother said dismissively. “Arguing,” she laughed, gesturing toward their guests.

He didn’t hear any more, as he headed into the kitchen where Mafalda was doing dishes. “*Caro*!” she wailed. “What happened? My sweet boy, are you well?”

“Nosebleed,” he said in mortification. He snatched some ice from the freezer, wrapping it in the napkin to press it back to his nose. “There’s blood on the tablecloth.”

“Forget it,” she said dismissively. “Go rest, darling boy. Off your feet!”

He smiled, allowing her to press a kiss to his temple before she ushered him off to the living room. He could hear more guests arriving for drinks after dinner, and he hid behind the bar in the living room, wedging himself against the wall where no one could see him.

“Will?” he heard Hannibal call softly. “Will, where are you?”

“Here,” he said softly, the sound muffled by the napkin wedged against his nose. The blood flow was slowing, at least.

Hannibal came behind the bar, wedging himself in the tight space on the floor by Will’s side. “It happens when you get worked up?” he asked softly, pushing the napkin away from Will’s face so he could inspect his nose himself. Their legs were touching, bare knees bumping with every shift of their bodies. “Anxiety driven nosebleeds?”

Will let him dote on him, as his touch was likely not going to continue. “Since I was a kid,” he mumbled.

“You still are a kid,” Hannibal replied, letting Will’s jaw go once he was satisfied that he’d live. Will thought for sure he’d leave but was shocked when Hannibal lifted his leg into his lap to massage his foot. It wasn’t a gentle massage. It was rough, and he could feel the bones grinding in his foot.

“Ouch!” Will yelped, slapping Hannibal’s arm. “That fucking hurts.”

“For a minute,” Hannibal agreed. “Give it a minute.”

He continued working Will’s foot with his clever fingers, and sure enough, the ache passed, and it felt… good. He slumped back against the bar, pressing his other foot into Hannibal’s

hands in a silent demand. Hannibal chuckled, taking his other foot and working it between his fingers, making Will hiss until the pain passed.

“Better?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Will sighed.

“This was my fault?” Hannibal wondered, gesturing towards the bloody napkin with a grimace while massaging his leg.

“No,” he mumbled. “It’s… it just happens. I’ve always been able to… kind of pick up emotions from people around me?” Hannibal glanced up at him with a raised eyebrow as though he were in disbelief, and Will sighed. “I know how that sounds, but… I can. The tension between that married couple outside was palpable. Then… then I was feeling you. How you craved me in that moment. How I craved you. It was overwhelming. I’m… I’m a mess, I know.”

“You’re perfect,” Hannibal countered seriously, lifting Will’s foot to press a kiss against his ankle. The feel of his lips against his skin was blissful. “Have your parents ever taken you to someone? A therapist? Doctor? It could be… an empathy disorder, possibly.”

“Never been to see anyone,” Will said distractedly, a little moan rumbling from his throat as Hannibal worked his fingers up the back of his leg. “They said art and music people feel things more deeply than other people. That it’s normal.”

“To a degree,” Hannibal said doubtfully. “After a certain point, especially regarding nosebleeds, I think it ventures into something else.”

“You think there’s something wrong with me,” Will realized, blushing hot in embarrassment.

“No,” he sighed, sliding his fingers back down to Will’s feet. “I think you have a gift. Something rare and beautiful. I think… if you learned to understand it and work with it in a healthy way, it would be like a sixth sense for you. Like a superpower.”

“What if I told you that… I’m not an art and music person,” he said softly, admitted something that he’d never admitted to anyone else out loud for the first time.

Hannibal looked stunned by it, and he shook his head. “Don’t follow, Will.”

“I’ve taken piano lessons since I was four because… because my parents wanted me to. I know art and history because my parents wanted me to. Nothing I do is because I love to do it. Nothing of me is… me. Nothing of me is original. I am… the combined effort of everyone I’ve ever known.”

Hannibal’s chest rose and fell a little quicker, his amber eyes dipping towards Will’s mouth while licking his lips. “I see you, Will,” he whispered. “The real you. It’s buried deep, but I see glimpses. You’re everything I wish I could be.”

“That’s weird,” Will laughed, dabbing his nose just in case there was still blood. There was a little bit, but no where near as much as before. “I think the same thing about you.”

“Me?” Hannibal asked in surprise. “I honestly didn’t even think you *liked* me, Will,” he laughed, holding Will’s ankle in his big hand.

“Like you?” Will repeated dumbly. “*Like* you, Hannibal? I *worship* you.”

Hannibal’s cheeks pinkened, his eyes drifting towards the floor thoughtfully. “Come on. You should be on a couch, laying out.”

Will took his hand as Hannibal came to his feet, letting the older man navigate him to the couch in the living room. “Will you stay?” he asked miserably.

“I’ll stay,” he agreed, dumping Will on the couch before settling out at the opposite end. Will’s feet found their way in his lap, and he relaxed with his proximity.

Big, gentle, hands rubbed the arch of his foot, then his calves. They stayed perfectly respectable and chaste, even though it was driving Will insane. He’d never tell Hannibal to stop, though. Having his attention was always better than not having it at all.

“There you are,” Chiara announced, sauntering into the room in a tiny black sundress. “How is he? Will he live?” she asked, not so much looking at Will as she was at Will’s feet in Hannibal’s lap.

“I think so,” Hannibal replied, rubbing his fingers up Will’s shins gently. “Gave me a scare, though. He bled all over the dining table.”

“Really?” Chiara said drolly, shifting her eyes to where Hannibal was touching him. Marzia came into the room, heading straight for Will where he was resting on the couch.

“Are you alright?” she asked, sweeping her fingers through Will’s curls while Chiara lit a cigarette.

“Fine,” he said dismissively. Chiara took the cigarette and brought it to Will’s heel, and he yelped while pulling his foot away in disbelief.

“Chiara,” Hannibal chastised.

“What?” she asked indignantly. “You felt that? You have peasant feet! Peasant,” she laughed.

“Leave him alone,” Marzia huffed, ruffling Will’s hair to press a kiss against his forehead.

“Enough of that,” Chiara laughed. “Or you’ll give him another nosebleed.”

Hannibal came to his feet, abruptly leaving the room without a backwards glance. Will watched him warily, the urge to follow almost winning out against his dizziness.

“Where is he going?” he asked softly.

“How would I know?” Chiara sighed.

Chiara and Marzia eventually left, as he was moody and quiet with Hannibal's departure. He snatched a peach from the fruit bowl, heading out to sit by the front gate for Hannibal's return.

The sun set. The moon climbed over the line of trees, casting the orchard in icy light. Still, Hannibal didn't come back.

He went to his room eventually, pacing the small space while listening carefully for Hannibal in the next room. He fell asleep before Hannibal came back.

The next morning at breakfast, Hannibal joined them looking worse for wear. His eyes were reddened, purple bruises above each cheekbone that pronounced how little sleep he'd gotten. He wondered where Hannibal went. Who he was with. If he was making love to someone.

He wondered if he thought of Will at all.

"You look gaunt!" his mother said in concern, moving to Hannibal's side to tuck his hair back from his forehead. "Drink some apricot juice," she said, as if it cured all the world's problems.

Hannibal nodded, taking the juice to sip it with a wince. "Are you hungover?" his father asked with a laugh.

"A bit," he admitted with a shrug. "I apologize."

"Didn't hear you come in last night," Will said softly, drawing Hannibal's eyes to him.

"I was here," he replied just as softly. "Just… not here."

The answer was confusing, so Will averted his eyes back to his breakfast with a frown. A soft foot covered his own again, and his shoulders relaxed.

"Maybe you need a break," Harrison said with a regretful expression. "Take today off from writing and from aiding me. Find a little time for yourself."

"I could use the distraction," Hannibal replied with a shake of his head. His foot abruptly left Will's under the table. "Keep me out of trouble," he sighed under his breath.

"If you're certain," his dad shrugged. "I have another box of correspondence that needs organizing, and I have a paper that I'd like your opinion about, if you have the time to read it."

"Of course," Hannibal agreed with a smile. It didn't touch his eyes, though.

"Maybe talk about work when it's time to work," his mother suggested while pouring Hannibal another glass of juice.

"Agreed," his dad laughed, then cracked into his egg.

Two days went by without Hannibal speaking to him more than a hello. He looked worn out and exhausted, though Will had no idea what he was doing with his time. Every single time he'd searched Hannibal out to spend time with him, he was either busy or away from the villa.

Things weren't better for Will, either. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't eat. His thoughts were a wild flurry in his head, and his stomach sat in knots constantly.

His every thought was of Hannibal. What he was doing. Who he was with. Why he wasn't speaking to Will whatsoever. His entire day was spent waiting for Hannibal to notice him, equally afraid that he would.

He woke up to the sounds of Hannibal in their shared shower. They had breakfast together with his parents. A few times, he tried to catch Hannibal's eyes, and his heart would thud wildly every time they met for the briefest of seconds.

It would also shatter in his chest every time Hannibal purposefully avoided him. He wanted to scream. Pound Hannibal's chest with his fists and tell him that he was *killing* him with his indifference.

Would Hannibal stare down at him in disinterest while Will's eyes welled with tears? Would his gaze remain cold while Will begged him to *touch* him, talk to him, see him, *notice* him?

He had no idea, but every night that passed made him want to barge into Hannibal's room without a stitch of clothing on his body. See if Hannibal looked away from him, then.

More than anything else, he wanted Hannibal's company. There was no one he could talk to about this, and it was eating away at his insides.

Marzia called him on the third night without Hannibal. "Come into town with me?" she implored.

"I…" Will sighed, rubbing his burning eyes. "I don't know. My mom might not want me to go out after having a nosebleed like I had."

"Are you still not feeling well?" she asked in concern.

"I feel…" he grimaced, shaking his head. "Fine. I can meet you out, sure. Seven?"

"At the plaza?" she asked.

"Sure," he agreed. "See you soon."

After getting off the phone, he went to his room to get ready for the night. He dressed up a bit in long jeans and a button-down shirt, rolling the sleeves up to his elbows. He shaved his face

and tamed his curls as best he could, silently hoping that they might run into Hannibal in town.

He clearly spent a few nights a week drinking, though Will had no idea where he went.

He came downstairs for dinner, and Mafalda grabbed his arm by the dinner table. “Why are you so dressed up? You should be resting!”

“I’m going out tonight,” he told her, wincing at the outrage on her face.

“You are not!” she wailed. “You bled for two hours, Caro! You should be off your feet and resting! Tell him, Madame. He should be resting!”

“He’s fine,” his mother said, lighting a cigarette while relaxing under the lime tree. “You’re well, aren’t you dearest?”

“Yeah,” he agreed with a nod.

“Leave him be,” his mother laughed, taking a dainty pull on her cigarette.

He touched Mafalda’s arm to let her know that her concern was appreciated, then helped her set the table for dinner.

“There you are!” Marzia chirped, beaming at him as he walked towards her in the plaza. “I was worried about you.”

“I’m fine,” he shrugged, glancing around the square to see who else was there.

Hannibal was no where in sight, and he scowled as they turned to walk along the sidewalk together. “Coffee?” she asked after a beat.

“Sure,” he shrugged again.

Their date was more than a little awkward, as his eyes were constantly looking around them to see if he’d find Hannibal coming out from a bar or café nearby. Marzia seemed to notice, and she sighed. “Do you have somewhere else you’d rather be?” she asked softly.

The question pulled him from his reverie, and he shook his head. “No,” he said defensively. “Not at all. Why… why would you ask that?”

“I’m asking you if there is somewhere else you’d rather be,” she repeated, her delicate cheeks heating with a blush. “Or if there is someone else you’d rather be with.”

Will felt completely mortified by the question. If… if Marzia knew where his heart was, then it must be obvious to other people, too. “I don’t understand the question,” he scoffed.

“An idiot would understand what I’m asking you, but you don’t,” she said in disbelief, her arms crossed defensively.

“Still don’t follow,” he argued futilely, turning away from her to watch a group of people leaving the bar across the street.

No Hannibal there, either.

“I care about you,” she said bluntly, forcing Will to look back to her regretfully. “I care about you, Will. Sometimes… sometimes I think it’s useless, because I know you’re prone to changing your mind.”

“What does that mean?” Will asked offendedly.

“It means…” she sighed, sweeping a hand through her silky hair. “It means that I think you’ll end up hurting me. I don’t want to be hurt by you.”

He leaned forward without thought, pressing a kiss against her delicate lips. She barely responded in her surprise, a faint blush creeping up her face. “Kiss me again?” she asked softly.

He smiled, leaning into her to kiss her again. Her lips were petal soft and… small against his own. Her tongue was almost hesitant as she kissed him, her mouth tasting of sweet tea from the café. Her hips pressed forward against his, stirring his cock to life in his jeans.

When she felt it against her hip, she smiled. A gentle hand cupped him in his jeans, and he hissed as she stroked him through the material. “You’re so hard,” she giggled.

“Yeah,” he agreed, closing his eyes to the sensation. It felt good, but… her hand wasn’t big enough.

Her grip wasn’t firm enough.

He kissed her harder for it, pressing himself against her fully.

“Let’s get out of here,” she suggested, kissing his cheek before letting him go.

She didn’t bother taking off all of her clothes. They stopped along the river on the walk home, disappearing into the darkened woods surrounding the water. In the grass, he spread her thighs and pressed himself between them, laving her mouth and throat with kisses.

Her little moans and sighs urged him on, and he slid her panties aside as she unzipped his jeans and undid the buckle, working his pants off only far enough to slide his erection free.

He slid into her with no resistance whatsoever. She was warm and wet, her kisses sweet and gentle as he rocked his hips against hers. Marzia moaned, urging him on by grasping his ass, pressing him against her more fully.

It felt absolutely divine. The warm grip of her body around his cock felt blissful, and in a painfully short few moments, he withdrew from her body sharply, spilling against the grass between her thighs. “God,” he breathed, hiding his face against her stomach in embarrassment. “I’m sorry! That was… I am so sorry,” he laughed.

Her giggle sounded forgiving, and she laced her fingers through his curls. “It’s okay,” she laughed. “It happens.”

“That felt incredible,” he sighed, rolling onto his back while tucking himself away into his jeans. “Sorry it was so…”

“It’s okay,” she repeated, rolling onto her side to kiss his cheek. “You owe me next time.”

Next time. He smiled, nuzzling into her throat to kiss the side of her neck.

He took a shower when he got home, even though it was late. He could hear Hannibal ruffling papers in his room, and he wanted the man to know that he’d been out.

That he’d been doing something that required a shower at midnight.

He heard the distinct sound of papers being throw down, then footsteps as they retreated from the room, then the house.

Will went to the window as he rounded the corner, and he wondered if his little act of jealous revenge was worth it.

Wherever Hannibal went, he didn’t come back. Will waited in his room, opening the door that joined their bedrooms so he wouldn’t miss his return. He sat at the small desk, scribbling a note to Hannibal furiously.

Please don’t avoid me.

He shook his head and tore the note from the pad, bunching it up before throwing it to the floor.

Please don’t ignore me. It kills me.

He sighed, crumpling that note, too. “Way over the top,” he said with a shake of his head.

Can’t stand thinking you hate me.

He stared at the words, wincing at how desperate they were.

Another crumpled paper fell to the floor.

I’d sooner die than know you hate me.

He stared at those words, pulling his fingers through his hair in irritation.

Can't stand the silence. I need to speak to you.

He stared at those words and found no fault with them. He took the note and placed it by Hannibal's abandoned paperwork, leaving it in plain sight before retreating to his room.

Sleep never came to him, so he gave up as the sun began to rise, casting the orchard in fiery orange. The humidity was back in full force, so he grabbed his swim trunks and headed down for a swim.

The cool water woke him up a bit, and he watched the sunlight crest through the trees as birds came to life around him. He floated on his back, watching the sky shift from early morning lavender to blue, pretending he was floating with the clouds.

He came to breakfast in a damp bathing suit, rubbing sleep from his eyes while flopping down next to his mother at the picnic table. "Morning," he yawned.

Hannibal glanced up at him with red-rimmed eyes, a grimace on his face. "You have fun last night?" he asked pointedly.

Will blushed, averting his eyes up at Mafalda as she set down his four-minute egg. "*Comme ci comme ça*," he shrugged.

"You got in late," his mother frowned, sweeping her hand through his curls. "Where were you?"

"With Marzia," he said, glancing at Hannibal to gauge his reaction.

Hannibal's shoulders tensed, but he kept his eyes firmly on his glass of juice in front of him. "Several hundred color slides of our boxer and the others like him arrived yesterday from Berlin," his dad said after a sip of coffee. "We should start cataloging them. That will keep us busy until lunch I imagine."

Hannibal glanced up with a smile, nodding while cracking his egg open.

After breakfast, Will headed up to his room to change into swim shorts that weren't damp when he noticed the note he'd left Hannibal on his desk.

He went to it immediately, unfolding it to find that there was a response.

Grow up. I'll meet you at midnight.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all! I know it feels like we're going in a bad direction, but... we'll get there. Another chapter, and we'll get there.

If you're enjoying this, please take a minute and let me know. If you're not, do that, too. I'm trying to gauge whether or not I should continue, which is crazy I realize, but this story is massive and I'm feeling like it's not a lot of people's cup of tea.

Here is about the part of the story where we're going to veer from CMBYN canon, and I can promise you that there won't be anymore explicitly sexual scenes with anyone but Hannigram. Here their story begins. <3

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Here we go! Finally getting to some good Hannigram! Our favorite scene in the movie is coming up next chapter, so get readyyyyyy. <333333

His heart slammed in his chest, a wide smile cracking his mouth as he pressed the note first to his lips, then his heart. His legs gave out, so he sat on his bed with a vibrant laugh, clutching the paper against his chest. He glanced down at his watch, biting his lip.

10:36am.

Thirteen and a half hours away.

He could do this.

He changed into his dry swim trunks, setting his damp ones out over the faucet of the bathtub to dry.

By the time he got back to the pool to read his book, it was 11:04.

He sighed, settling out in the lawn chair to do some reading in an attempt to kill some time. The book he had was not one that he wanted his parents to catch him reading. It would be considered grotesque, in their opinions.

For Will though, it was fascinating. It was written by one of the FBI profilers that caught Ted Bundy, and it included interviews as well as detailed descriptions of how he was caught.

He had picked it up at the bookstore and almost put it right back down, but…

It stayed in his hand. There were several other books just like it hidden away under his bed.

His parents wanted him to become a pianist or a professor, like his dad. He had no doubt they'd feel pride in him if he worked in an art gallery or a museum.

They were not things that he felt any connection towards.

Not that he had the slightest idea what he wanted to do with his life. This Special Agent Ressler of the FBI, though… he was a badass.

Even despite his interest in his book, he nodded off.

A kiss was pressed against his forehead sometimes later, and he awoke with a snap. Marzia giggled over him, ruffling his curls affectionately. “Did you sleep last night?” she laughed, yanking her dress up over her head so she stood in her bathing suit.

“Not really,” he admitted with a yawn. He glanced down at his watch, smiling that it was after two, now.

“Come swim with me?” she implored, taking his hand to yank him towards the trough.

He went willingly, jumping in for a swim with Marzia clung to his waist.

Her gentle kisses turned heated in the pool, and he wasn’t sure he wanted this from her. His mind was completely preoccupied by Hannibal, and their meeting later tonight. He wondered what Hannibal wanted. If they would kiss again.

He pulled away from her with a grimace, and she shriveled against the side of the pool. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No,” he said softly, glancing down at his watch again. “Just… not here.”

She looked disappointed, but still stayed with him for the remainder of the afternoon until his mother came to the pool to wave him over. “Will,” she called. “Lunch is ready, darling!”

Marzia tugged her sundress back on, moving to collect her purse and shoes from the side of his lawn chair. “I should go,” she said softly, leaning forward for a kiss.

He dodged it by reaching for his novel and his own shirt and shoes, nodding his head as if he hadn’t seen her lean forward for a kiss in the first place. “I’ll call you,” he said, waving her off while returning to the villa.

Hannibal was having a glass of wine with his lunch, which was unusual for him. Will sat by his left, toeing off his sandal to rub the top of Hannibal’s foot with his own, earning himself a gentle smile from the older man.

“Don’t forget,” his mother said, pouring him a glass of pomegranate juice. “Mr. Keller and Mr. Hodell are coming to dinner tonight. I’d like you here for it, Will.”

Will sighed, forking his salad miserably. “Sonny and Cher,” he said to Hannibal, smirking at his confused expression.

“Okay…” his father grimaced, watching Will with disappointment etched on his face.

“I want you to wear that shirt they got you for your birthday,” his mother beamed. “You know, the floral one?”

“No,” Will argued, making his mother hum in disapproval. “No! It’s… too big on me. It’s too loud. I look like a scarecrow in it!”

“They got it for you as a gift,” his father argued.

“You wear it as a gesture of good faith!” his mother finished for him.

“Fine!” Will laughed. “Fine. I will wear it… if I remember to.”

“You’ll remember,” his dad laughed. “You’ll remember because you’re going to go upstairs and get ready for dinner later, and I had Mafalda dig it out from the closet for you. It’s hanging on the bathroom door.”

Will had seriously hoped it was lost somehow, and he laughed. “Alright! *Alright*.”

“You could join us for dinner if you’d like, Hannibal,” his mother offered.

“I’m afraid I have to get my manuscript into town,” he said regretfully. “I have some banking to do there as well. I think I’ll have dinner there before I come back.”

“I could take your manuscript into town,” Will shrugged, intentionally rubbing his foot over Hannibal’s as he offered it. “One less stop you’d need to make?”

“No thanks,” Hannibal replied with a shake of his head. “I was going to stay in town anyway. Work on my manuscript in the plaza, maybe.”

“If that’s what you want,” Will shrugged, poking at his lunch disinterestedly. He still felt completely exhausted, so he planned to catch a nap before they’d meet later on.

Later on. He itched to know what time it was but couldn’t bring himself to look at his watch. He reached across Hannibal’s place setting, pretending to reach for a cookie but secretly looked at his watch, instead.

3:20pm. Close. So close.

Hannibal grasped his wrist, turning it with a smirk. “You got the time?” he asked with a grin while sliding his foot up Will’s leg. The friction of it caused a fire in him.

“Three-twenty-one,” he offered, biting his lip with a blush.

“Guess I should be off, then,” he chuckled. “Thank you for lunch!” he said as he came to his feet.

“Any time, Caro,” his mother smiled, watching him head off towards his bike. His tee shirt was clung against his frame, highlighting every inch of him deliciously. “Our movie star,” his mother mused.

Will licked his lips while watching him ride down the road, sunlight glinting off his ash-blonde hair. He was a beauty. There was no question about it.

Even with a nap, the day dragged on. He awoke just after six to get ready for dinner, wincing as his father burst into the bathroom while he was getting dressed. He clutched the towel around his waist from where he was shaving at the sink, “Dad!” he blushed furiously.

“Where’s the shirt?” his dad asked, touching the button-down he swapped out for the floral one that he’d been given. “What’s this, Will? Where did you put the shirt they gave you?”

“Why do I have to wear it?” he asked with his hands on his hips. “God, it looks ridiculous!”

“You’ll wear it,” his father said adamantly. “You’ll wear it, and you’ll behave tonight. When I ask you to play, you’ll play. You’re too old not to accept people for what they are, Will. You weren’t raised that way, and I won’t stand for it in this house.”

“Such a hypocrite,” Will chuckled ruefully.

“Excuse me?” his father snapped.

“You talk about accepting people for what they are, then tell me I have to play whether I want to or not. What if I don’t want to? What if that’s not who I am?”

His father’s mouth fell open as silence descended, and Will averted his eyes from the disappointment on his father’s face. “It wasn’t nice of you to call them ‘Sonny and Cher’,” he said disapprovingly.

“Mom calls them that,” Will argued futilely.

“Then to accept gifts from them!” his father went on. “Is it because they’re gay or because they’re ridiculous? Is *that* it? I hope not. And if you know as much about economics when you’re Zafar’s age you’ll be a very wise man indeed and a credit to me. Now get into this,” his father snapped, tossing the Hawaiian shirt to the bed in his temporary room. “Come downstairs when you’re ready.”

He leaned against the bathroom sink as his father slammed out the door. He felt embarrassed and chastised, as he well should. He didn’t know why he made the comment about the couple, calling them Sonny and Cher. If it was hypocritical of his dad to tell him that he had to play the piano whether he wanted to or not, then it was hypocritical of Will to make fun of a couple for being… gay.

Did he make the comment because he was ashamed of aspects of himself? He stared at himself in the mirror, not liking a single thing he saw. His eyes were too big. His hair too wildly curly. His jawline was too sharp, and his ears stuck out too much.

He had thin lips and he was scrawny. There was *nothing* about himself that he liked. “Do I even know you?” he asked himself in the mirror.

The answer was no. No, he really didn’t. What he did know, he didn’t care for at all.

Dinner with Zafar and Alvaro went well enough. He wore the shirt, which… wasn't honestly that bad. It was black with big bold white flowers on it, and… he'd kind of grown into it since they'd given it to him last June.

He hadn't realized he'd grown so much until he put it on and it fit him… well, perfectly.

He watched the couple interact with a clinical eye through dinner. They were obviously so very much in love, and he felt a pang about making a derogatory comment about them. Zafar touched Alvaro often; a chaste press of his fingers against his forearm, a kiss against his cheek. Alvaro blushed and beamed every time, as though they hadn't been together for twelve years.

His parents didn't show affection like that anymore. That much was for certain.

He tried to imagine himself and Hannibal like they were. Well, *almost* like they were. He couldn't imagine he or Hannibal ever wearing a pink suit to anything. Or… well, being quite so damned flamboyant. He envied them, though. They knew exactly who they were, and they loved exactly who they loved without shame or regret.

They were blissfully happy. He could feel it on them like a second skin.

Will had no idea what that might be like.

When his father asked him to play the piano after dinner, he did so without a fight. He took his wristwatch off first, placing it on the piano where the numbers blinked as he played.

11:04pm.

11:05pm.

He kept playing, watching the time drift by with a sense of growing anxiety. The piece he was playing picked up in speed as though he wished his fingers could make the time go by faster.

At 11:16, Hannibal came in and waved hello at everyone before heading upstairs quietly.

At 11:21, Will feigned sleepiness and apologized before heading upstairs, too.

His heart felt like it was in his throat as he retreated into his room. He could hear Hannibal ambling around in his room, then the bathroom. He used the extra time to fix his hair and stare at his reflection in the bedroom. He tried to calm himself because a nosebleed right now would be fucking mortifying.

He watched from his bedroom window as Alfaro and Zafar left at quarter of midnight, each clearly just as tipsy as his parents were as they said goodbye.

He ditched the Hawaiian shirt, yanking on a tee shirt instead. At least the tee shirt didn't smell like nervous sweat.

At midnight, he crept towards Hannibal's door, knocking gently against it. There was no answer, and his heart fell in his stomach.

He opened the door slowly, just to see if maybe Hannibal was sleeping already.

He wasn't. Hannibal was on his balcony, his chiseled face tipped up towards the moonlight where it broke through the darkened treetops. "I'm glad you came," he said softly, eyes still cast out towards the moon. "I could hear you moving around in your room. I thought you'd gone to bed. Maybe changed your mind."

Will went to him slowly, covering his hand with his own where it rested against the stone railing. "Changed my mind?" he repeated in disbelief. "Of course, I was coming."

Hannibal's eyes drifted from the moon down to where their hands connected. "Do you feel it?" he asked.

The steady thrum of electric heat pulsed between their connected skin, and he gripped Hannibal's hand a little tighter in his own. "I feel it."

A gentle hand cupped the side of his face, touching him so softly it was like Hannibal thought that he might break. His eyes were heavy. Intensely focused on Will's face, his throat. Will took the opportunity to look right back, trailing his eyes over every inch of Hannibal's face.

"I'm nervous," Hannibal admitted with an awkward laugh.

"Me too," he admitted because he was. He'd never been attracted to a man before this. He'd never noticed one like he noticed Hannibal. It was like the older man had worked his way under Will's skin, burrowing himself into his cells. "My thoughts used to be narrated by my own voice when I thought," he said softly. "That voice has somehow become your voice. I can't get you out of my head."

"You're in *my* every thought," Hannibal sighed, inching his body closer to Will's. "It's only fair that I'm in yours as well."

They moved into his room, each sitting awkwardly on the side of the bed, carefully not touching. He'd wanted this exact thing since he'd met Hannibal, and now it was happening. His cock was stirring in his shorts, but he had no idea how to move forward. Hannibal seemed awkwardly shy all of a sudden, his eyes fixed firmly on the wood flooring.

Will inched his foot over, covering Hannibal's bare foot with his own. Hannibal jumped at the contact, a hesitant smile splitting his lips. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," Will replied while biting back a grin.

Hannibal's other foot covered his, wedging his foot like a sandwich between them. The gesture was unbearably sweet. Comforting. Will reached out without thought and hugged him, wrapping his arms around his neck to keep him close.

"That's a start," Hannibal hummed, wrapping his own arms around Will's body to tuck him closer. "Does this make you happy?" he asked. Will nodded against his shoulder, inhaling the

spice of his cologne as well as clean sweat from his hairline. “You aren’t going to have a nosebleed, are you?”

He laughed, pulling away from Hannibal so their eyes could meet. “No,” he said softly.

“Are you sure you want this?” Hannibal asked hesitantly, sliding his hot fingers under Will’s tee shirt to touch the skin of his back in a gentle caress.

“I want this,” Will replied honestly. “I want *you*.”

Hannibal shivered, gripping Will’s waist to haul him closer. “We haven’t talked,” he mumbled distractedly while palming the flesh of Will’s waist and back almost greedily.

“No need to,” Will whispered, licking his lips while pressing his forehead against Hannibal’s own. The current between them was making him dizzy, arcing electricity that was finally, finally, finding somewhere to ground itself.

Hannibal shivered, his hands gripped Will’s hips almost desperately while he nosed along Will’s jawline. “Can I kiss you?” he asked softly.

Will laughed, gripping the hair at the nape of his neck tight in his fists before slamming his mouth against Hannibal’s desperately.

This time, Hannibal didn’t hold back. This time, he reacted beautifully.

He clawed Will closer as their mouths devoured one another, pulling Will until he was straddling his waist. Will let himself touch him, combing his fingers through his hair, touching his jawline, his throat. He was wearing the wine-red button-down that he’d worn the day he got here, and Will clawed at it desperately, wanting to feel his chest hair against his fingers.

“Off,” Hannibal gasped, tugging at Will’s tee shirt, too. “Off, off,” he pleaded. “Just pull it over my head,” he laughed, holding his arms up as Will ripped the shirt over his head. His tee shirt got taken off, too, and then they were chest to chest as they kissed and rocked against one another.

The feel of Hannibal’s thick cock in his shorts made Will feel like he could come from that alone. Hannibal held him and touched him as though he were touching a miracle instead of a scrawny teenaged boy. His eyes fluttered shut as Will pressed kisses against his forehead, his cheeks, his chin. He was so beautiful that Will couldn’t believe he had him this way.

He couldn’t believe Hannibal *wanted* him this way.

He arched his back, going up on his knees as Hannibal tugged his shorts down his body. They wouldn’t go further than his knees, so he stood from the bed, standing between Hannibal’s spread thighs as he tugged them off his legs. He’d never been naked like this in front of another person.

He found he liked being naked in front of Hannibal. The way the other man looked at him made him feel beautiful.

Hannibal's hands trailed over his bare thighs, cupping his hipbones reverently. He leaned forward, nuzzling the skin of Will's stomach with his mouth before trailing the opened mouth kisses lower.

Then lower.

Will gasped as his cock was wrapped in tight, wet, heat. He threaded his fingers through Hannibal's hair, glancing down the line of his torso to watch his cock glisten as it slid in and out of the plush wet of Hannibal's mouth.

His balls drew up, that familiar energy passing between them. "Hannibal," he gasped, digging his fingernails into the meat of his shoulder.

Hannibal sucked him further down his throat, cupping his balls in his hands, and that was all it took.

He came with a moan, rocking his hips forward without thought. Hannibal took all of it, sliding his hands around Will's waist to cup his ass and drag him further down his throat.

Will shivered as Hannibal released him, licking the head of Will's cock for a brief few moments to clean him up. The feel of his tongue sliding into the slit of his cock felt incredible. Incredible enough that his erection never went down.

Hannibal arched an eyebrow, smiling up at Will in disbelief while stroking his thickening cock in his fist. "To be seventeen again," he mused. "You taste exquisite. Your scent," he sighed, nuzzling his face against Will's stomach, "is divine."

Will gripped the material of Hannibal's shorts, tugging them off his hips. Hannibal helped him willingly, lifting his hips up while Will tugged them off.

The sight before him was one he'd never considered that he'd get to see for himself. Hannibal's cock was *beautiful*. Thick, long, and flushed deep red. He straddled Hannibal's thighs again, nudging him up the bed while placing his own cock against Hannibal's to feel him.

His own cock was thinner. Not as long. He wasn't small, he knew, but compared to Hannibal…

Compared to Hannibal, he was nothing at all.

"You're so beautiful," Will said softly, dragging his fingertips down Hannibal's chest. The firm flesh barely gave under the pressure of his fingers, and he winced while he considered what he must look like to Hannibal. *This is what he feels like*, he mused while filing away a new tally on things he knew about Hannibal.

"You are the single most beautiful person I've ever seen, Will," he sighed. A large hand cupped over his chest, dragging fingertips only down his torso. "So beautiful."

Will leaned forward to kiss him, and Hannibal wrapped his arms around his shoulders to roll them until Will was under him, his thighs wrapped around Hannibal's waist. "What do you

want?" he asked softly, trailing kisses down his bare chest.

"Anything," he blurted, arching his back as Hannibal suckled his nipple, biting down on it when it pebbled against his tongue. Hannibal pulled away to blow on the wet nub, making Will shiver. "I want you. Inside of me. I want to feel you for days."

This time, Hannibal shivered, his eyes darkened to near black as he stared up at Will's face. "Then you'll have me," he promised.

He reached into the side table drawer, procuring a little tube of something clear. Will touched it curiously, and Hannibal grinned. "I got it at the pharmacy today," he admitted with a laugh. "It's supposed to make this… easier."

"You don't know?" Will asked in surprise.

"I *don't* know," Hannibal admitted, biting his lip. "But I want to."

Will went to roll over, and Hannibal stopped him. "Don't I have to…?"

"Like this," Hannibal said, kissing the hollow of his throat gently. "I want to see you."

Hannibal raised Will's legs, spreading his thighs apart while pressing his knees up almost to his chest. He heard the cap of the tube open and close, and Hannibal rubbed it between his fingers curiously. "This is going to help," he said with a laugh. "Feel this," he offered.

Will pressed his fingertips into the clear gel, marveling at the silky-smooth texture of it. The way their fingertips slid against one another easily. "That feels… good," he laughed.

"I hope it does," Hannibal agreed, pressing a kiss against his knee. "Last time I'll ask. Are you sure, Will?"

"Yes," he pleaded, tears in his eyes through his desperation. "Yes, please."

Hannibal leaned forward to capture his mouth again, then he felt silken fingers circling his entrance. A single digit penetrated him, and he and Hannibal gasped. "God," Will moaned as the digit slid inside of him deeper.

They kissed while Hannibal opened him with his fingers. It didn't feel especially incredible, but… because it was Hannibal, it was perfect. He could feel Hannibal stretching him subtly as they kissed, his fingers scissoring him open gently. They slid in deeper, and brushed something inside of him that made him arch from the bed with a moan. "Shh," Hannibal laughed, kissing his cheek and his jawline affectionately. "There?" he asked, striking the spot again with his fingers.

Will shivered, the rolling pleasure spreading through his gut. "There," he breathed. "Fuck, Hannibal, right there."

The sense of urgency picked up, Hannibal's mouth crashing against his while he fingered Will open, rubbing at what Will assumed must be his prostate. It made his muscles contract

and twitch, pleasure churning hot in his blood. Another finger was added, stretching him open enough that he winced.

“Too much?” Hannibal panted against his mouth.

“No,” he sighed, licking Hannibal’s top lip. “Not enough.”

Hannibal grinned, leaning forward to kiss him again while pumping his fingers in and out of Will’s body. His cock felt heavy where it leaked steadily against his abdomen, and Hannibal took a deep inhale. “Your scent,” he repeated, eyes closed as if in rapture. “Is divine.”

“Please,” Will pleaded. “Now, Hannibal. I need you now.”

Hannibal nodded, withdrawing his fingers before slicking his cock with the gel on the bed. He pressed the thick head of it against Will’s body and pressed in, sliding in easily enough with the help of that miracle gel.

It still fucking hurt. His body felt speared open. Carved wide and deep by Hannibal’s intrusion.

His muscles locked up as Hannibal sank in fully, resting his pelvis against Will’s body. His breathing was erratic, Hannibal’s mouth pressing reassuring kisses against Will’s hairline. “Are you okay?”

He didn’t think he was. Everything ached, including his heart. Hannibal felt like he was too deeply buried inside of him. Like he’d never forget the feeling of being filled this way. He briefly worried over whether he’d feel this ache until he died.

He felt so stretched and uncomfortable that he wondered if there was a chance he was bleeding. Everything felt wet and hot, but he had no idea if it was from the gel, or from… tearing. Hannibal shifted his hips gently, nudging in and out of him with short rolls of his hips.

Will winced again, fighting the urge to tell him to stop. He didn’t want Hannibal to stop.

Mercifully, Hannibal went slow enough that eventually the pain of being entered started to become just a dull throb. It still hurt every time he thrust forward, but Will liked it. Love should hurt, he imagined.

Hannibal kissed him soundly, sliding his lips over to nuzzle into the cradle of his neck as he continued pumping into Will. His arms went under Will’s knees, lifting them up so he could press inside deeper.

It changed something. It changed everything. With every forward press, Hannibal’s cock was now landing squarely on that little pleasure center inside of him, and he gasped.

“There,” he moaned. “Hannibal, there,” he pleaded.

Hannibal hit that spot expertly then, drilling inside of him until they were both flushed with sweat. “Call me by your name,” Hannibal gasped into his ear, nibbling his earlobe sweetly.

“And I’ll call you by mine.”

Will pulled away enough to look at him as Hannibal’s hips stilled, their eyes shifting over one another as though seeing each other for the first time. “Will,” Will breathed.

“Hannibal,” he replied.

They were the same. Hannibal was him, and he was Hannibal. They’d begun to blur, and giving name to it felt… right.

“Will,” he repeated with a moan.

“Hannibal,” he breathed, snapping his hips while fucking into Will deeply.

He couldn’t worship Hannibal without worshipping himself.

He couldn’t love Hannibal without… without loving himself.

Pleasure rolled up Will’s spine, and he arched his back as Hannibal slammed into that spot with abandon. His cock pulsed where it was trapped between their stomachs, each roll of Hannibal’s hips bringing him friction that felt utterly divine.

Hannibal’s pace increased, their damp, hot, breaths mingling in the space between their mouths. He felt the sweat rolling down Hannibal’s back, and he dragged his fingers through it, savoring the essence of Hannibal against his fingertips. He came with a moan, his body contracting around Hannibal with each twitch and jerk of his cock against his abdomen, his come spilling across his chest in a hot spatter.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped, withdrawing quickly to jerk his cock in his fist. Will watched his face as he came, the way his mouth parted and his eyes darkened, watching Will reverently while coming across Will’s chest and stomach.

Will gasped, watching Hannibal’s come land in his own, and across his stomach and chest. Hannibal shivered while coming back down, reaching forward with his palm to smear their combined come across Will’s bare chest.

It felt sticky and hot, and Will watched, enraptured, as Hannibal leaned forward to lick the combined taste of them from his nipple. “Beautiful,” Hannibal praised softly. “So very beautiful.”

His entrance felt swollen and gaping, pulsing with his heartbeat uncomfortably. Hannibal reached for his red shirt on the floor, using it to wipe down Will’s chest gently, then between his cheeks. “You wore that shirt when you first got here,” Will said softly. “Can I… Can I have it when you… when you go?”

Hannibal held the shirt in his hand for a moment, dropping it off the side of the bed. “It’s yours, Will,” he promised.

They shifted beneath the blankets, and Hannibal scooped Will in his arms, pressing a kiss against his forehead.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal held him throughout the night. He knew, because he woke up frequently, unused to being held as he slept.

He watched the sun break over the horizon through his window. Even in sleep, Hannibal's fingertips stroked his bare chest, as if even unconscious, he could feel that energy between them. His entrance still ached. He was very well aware of his entire body, the way his hole still felt… gaping. Empty.

The back of his thighs ached from being pressed against his chest in a way that they never were, usually. His neck felt tender from Hannibal's day-old stubble scraping against it.

More than anything else, his heart ached for this moment. Hannibal would leave. He'd return to New York and never look back again. Will might be his first time with another man, but he wouldn't be his last time.

He'd move on and he'd forget about Will eventually, but he knew he'd never get over Hannibal. This ache in his gut had nothing to do with the ache in his body. He knew already that no one else would have him this way. Never again.

He was Hannibal's. Even if Hannibal lived four thousand miles away.

A kiss was pressed to his bare shoulder, and he realized then that Hannibal was awake. "You're not happy. You're feeling sick about it, aren't you?" he whispered.

Will swallowed thickly, unable to explain what he was feeling in that moment. He *was* feeling sick. Sick that this perfect thing between them had an expiration date. He'd leave and continue his life elsewhere. Without Will.

"I knew we shouldn't have," Hannibal continued at Will's silence. "I knew it. We should have talked."

Will's heart shattered in his chest, and he moved without thought to hug Hannibal close. Hannibal seemed stunned by it, and he held Will gently, stroking his fingers through his hair. "Did you hate it?" he asked softly.

He pulled away to press a kiss against Hannibal's cheekbone. "No. I didn't hate it at all."

"You can go back to sleep if you want," he offered, still stroking through Will's hair gently.

He closed his eyes, and even then, he could feel Hannibal's gaze burning against his face. "You're staring," he said softly with his eyes closed. When he opened his eyes, Hannibal seemed surprised that Will knew even without looking at him. "Want to go swimming with me?"

Hannibal's careful smile faltered on his face, and he nodded.

The lake was utterly deserted when they got to it. Early morning fog still lingered on the surface of the water, which was still and calm as glass. The sun was just cresting through the trees, burning off the fog and dew from the grass beneath his feet.

Hannibal stood by his side, though there was distance between them. They went for a swim, washing one another from their bodies as though it had never happened.

When they got back to the house, they crept through the back door, as they could hear Mafalda in the kitchen already. Will went to his temporary room through the bathroom door, and Hannibal went to his room through his own.

The bathroom door was opened in Hannibal's room, and they made eye contact before Will drifted into his temporary room to hide his raw feelings from Hannibal.

The door that connected their rooms snapped open abruptly as Will removed his tee shirt, making him jump. "Come here," Hannibal said sternly, his eyes smoldering. Will blinked at him in surprise, moving to the threshold of the door cautiously. "Take off your trunks," Hannibal instructed.

Will slid his damp swim shorts off his hips without hesitation, his eyes firmly set on Hannibal and what he wanted to do.

Hannibal held his waist, going to his knees before Will's feet. Will swept his fingers through his damp hair, pressing it back from his forehead sweetly. The touch made Hannibal's eyelids flutter shut, and he leaned forward to take Will's thickening cock in his mouth.

Will moaned, his cock filling rapidly under the hot suction of Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal slid over him eagerly, licking the underside of his cock as though he were starving for it. Without warning, Hannibal released him, rocking back on his heels. "Well that's promising," he said softly. "You're hard again. Good."

He went to move away, and Will stilled him with a hand against his shoulders. "It's not what we did," he blurted fiercely, eyes welling with tears that he wished he could hide from Hannibal. He couldn't hide, though. Hannibal watched his face, eyes shifting over him solemnly. "It's *not* what we did," he repeated, trying to get Hannibal to understand without saying it. "Don't you understand?" he asked desperately.

Hannibal leaned forward to press a kiss against his stomach. "You haven't made any of this easy for me," he said, nuzzling the skin of his flat belly with his nose. "Since the beginning, you've made it difficult."

"How so?" Will asked indignantly, though the fight was going out of him as Hannibal stroked his cock, flicking his tongue out to collect the flavor of Will that was leaking free.

“I have an extraordinary sense of smell,” he said softly, nuzzling the side of Will’s cock with his cheek while looking up at him with fire in his eyes. “Did I tell you that?”

“No,” Will shivered, the feel of his stubble too much against such sensitive skin.

“I can smell things that most other people cannot,” he admitted, still watching Will carefully. “When you’re aroused, you smell of a thunderstorm. Mineral-sharp and metallic. Like freshly fallen snow. Like the scent of the earth after it rains. I can smell you, Will. I’ve never smelled anything so good in my life,” he continued.

He slid his lips down Will’s shaft, sucking his cock into the back of his throat while laving the underside with his tongue. Will gripped his hair, holding him down for a beat before letting him slide away again. “When you wore my bathing suit,” he went on, watching Will closely as he blushed in hot mortification, “I knew it, Will. I walked into this room and all I could smell was the sharp scent of your arousal, though I couldn’t understand where it was coming from. It was coming from my bed,” he said, pressing a kiss against Will’s cock. “My bathing suit,” he went on, pressing another kiss to his shaft. “And my pillow. You marked my room with your scent, Will. You drove me insane.”

“You knew,” Will breathed, moaning as Hannibal sucked his cock back into his mouth. “Fuck. You’ve known this whole time?”

Hannibal hummed around his cock, holding the base of it with his fist while allowing the head to roll across his tongue with his mouth wide open. Will watched, enraptured, as a bead of his come coated Hannibal’s tongue. “I’ve known this whole time,” he agreed. “I could hardly stand to be in this room afterwards. I couldn’t write. I couldn’t think.”

He suckled the head of Will’s cock, igniting a fire in Will’s belly. “The night you came home smelling like a wet cunt and your own spend,” he said venomously, glaring up at Will with burning embers in his eyes, “I was livid, Will. *Livid*.”

“I thought you didn’t want me,” Will said softly, arching his back as he was sucked down Hannibal’s throat with vigor. Hannibal worked his cock quickly, and Will’s release tumbled from him with a guttural little moan.

Hannibal licked him clean, watching Will’s face as he came back to his feet. “Do you still believe that?”

Will went up on his tiptoes, licking into his mouth so he could taste himself, there. “No,” he breathed. “No, I don’t believe that anymore.”

The breakfast bell rang from downstairs, and Will bit his lip. “Go on,” he grinned, nipping Will’s bottom lip affectionately. “Go down before me. I’ll be there in a minute.”

Will got dressed quickly in a dry bathing suit and a tee shirt, heading downstairs, then outside where his parents were having breakfast. Mafalda pressed a kiss to Will’s temple as he sat down, and he smiled wide up at her. “Morning,” he laughed.

“Good morning, Caro,” Mafalda sighed, ruffling his curls.

She set an egg down in front of him as well as a glass of peach juice that he immediately reached for.

“You look happy this morning,” his mother remarked, lighting a cigarette.

“Slept good,” he shrugged.

“You did go to bed early,” his dad smiled, sipping his coffee while setting the paper he was reading down. “It agrees with you. You needed it, I think.”

“Yeah,” he blushed, drizzling a slice of bread with honey.

Hannibal came down a moment afterwards, coming outside freshly showered and shaved. He was dressed comfortably in a royal blue tee shirt and beige shorts, not a hair out of place. “Our movie star,” his mother laughed. “So good looking.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal blushed, cracking into his egg expertly while covering Will’s foot with his own under the table. “I have to head into town this morning to drop off a few pages of my manuscript as well as pick up the revisions they’ve made on the ones I’ve submitted already. Would you mind taking a look at them when I come back?”

“Of course,” his father said with a smile. “That’s no problem at all.”

After breakfast, Hannibal gathered his backpack and stood from the table. “I’ll be back a little later,” he offered, heading off towards his bike. Will watched him go while ice settled in his gut, and he got up immediately and followed after him.

Hannibal was already pedaling down the street by the time he picked up his own bike, throwing his leg over it to settle his weight in the seat.

He winced as his entrance throbbed uncomfortably, trying to find a comfortable position that just… wasn’t happening.

He pedaled madly, heading into town where Hannibal picked up and dropped off his manuscripts. He caught up eventually, smiling when he got there just as Hannibal was emerging from the building with a surprised smile on his face. “What happened?” he asked, glancing around to see if someone else had come, too.

“I just… had to see you,” Will blurted, blushing deeply with the admission.

“Aren’t you… aren’t you sick of me?” Hannibal asked hesitantly.

Will shook his head, dropping his eyes to their shoes. “I just wanted to be with you. I can… I can go back. If you want.”

Hannibal stepped into him, closing the distance between them to the point where onlookers might know it was more than friendly. “Do you have any idea how happy I am that we slept together?” he said softly.

Will’s eyes snapped up to meet Hannibal’s amber gaze. “I don’t… I don’t know.”

Hannibal smiled, a gentle finger reaching up briefly to touch under his chin, tipping Will's face up. "It's just like you not to know. I don't want you to regret any of it. It pains me to think that I might have… damaged you, one way or another. I don't want either of us to pay for what we did."

"I'm not going to tell anyone," Will said immediately. "No one will know."

"I don't mean in that way," Hannibal sighed. "For you, I imagine sex is fun and games, and it should be. At your age, it… it should be. For me, it's… something else that I haven't figured out yet. The fact that I can't figure it out scares me."

Will couldn't make sense of what he'd said. So very little of it made sense that he didn't know where to begin. "Are you sorry I came here?" he asked softly.

Hannibal smiled, blowing a breath through his lips. "I'd kiss you if I could."

Will leaned in as if sharing a secret with him, and Hannibal tipped forward to better hear it. "I want you to kiss me. Will. Will, Will," he breathed.

"Hannibal," he sighed against Will's ear, tipping his face into Will's throat discretely. "Hannibal, Hannibal," he repeated.

He rocked back on his heels, his cheeks flushed with his arousal. Hannibal took a deep inhale, his amber eyes dilating into darkness. "Let's go," he breathed. "I've got some work to do."

"Will you kiss me later?" Will asked softly, wincing as he settled on his bike.

"More than kiss you," Hannibal promised.

He didn't know what to do with his day while Hannibal was working. His book held no interest. His guitar felt too heavy. The piano felt too… boring.

He sighed, snatching a few peaches that had just been picked from a basket in the kitchen before moving up to the attic. He loved it up here, as no one ever, ever, came up here for anything. It was a private little oasis for him where no one knew to look for him.

He figured he'd nap, maybe. He ate a peach, relaxing against a worn mattress that was bare on the floor. Up this high from the ground, the windows caught the breeze outside, cooling him comfortably where he laid.

The peaches were slightly over-ripe. He took a bite, and the flesh gave way from the peach, dripping on his bare chest. He was making an absolute mess while eating it, but… no one came in the attic. No one would care that there was peach juice on a mattress that wasn't used.

He tossed the pit from the first peach, and then reached for the second. This one was even juicier than the first, he could feel it by how the flesh gave under the pressure of his

fingertips. He circled where the stem was, ripping it from the peach to discard it to the floor.

What remained was a firm, tight circle. He wondered if this was what it felt like for Hannibal to finger him.

His cock filled at the thought, and he licked his lips of the sticky remnants of the first peach he ate. He pressed his fingers into the top of the peach, pretending it was a tight hole he was trying to open up.

His fingers sank inside of the peach immediately, a gush of juices spilling over the fruit, down his chest and stomach. “Fuck,” he breathed, pressing his fingers deeper inside. The pit greeted him, and he circled his fingers around it, gripping it enough to pull it free.

What was left was a perfect, hollow hole inside the juicy peach. He fingered the flesh of it, wondering…

Wondering what it would feel like to have his cock buried inside of it.

With a quick glance around, he determined that he was alone. He slid the fly down on his shorts, withdrawing his cock which was straining and throbbing uncomfortably. With a moan, he slid himself inside the fruit.

It was cooler than being inside a person was, but… it was so fucking wet that it made up for it. He squeezed the peach in his fist, gripping himself through the wet flesh of it. He could feel the juices dribbling down his cock, over his balls.

Against his entrance that still felt swollen and used by Hannibal only hours before.

The juices of the peach were sticky against his abdomen, and it reminded him of the way he’d come across his own chest and stomach. The way that Hannibal looked as he spilled hot across his chest, too.

The way Hannibal rubbed their come into his skin, then licked their combined taste from his nipple.

He came with a gasp, filling the peach with his seed as his cock jerked and pulsed inside of it. He’d truly made a fucking mess of himself, and he set the peach aside on the table in embarrassment.

With drooping eyelids, he tucked himself away in his shorts, zipping up the fly before nodding off.

“I was looking everywhere for you,” Hannibal said softly, startling Will awake where he still laid on the bare mattress in the attic.

He blinked his eyes open, noting the sun setting in the far window. “W’time is it?” he mumbled, rubbing his eyes.

“After seven,” he grinned, moving to the bed to sit on the side of the mattress. Soft lips trailed down his stomach, and he hummed as if he tasted something he liked. Will laced his fingers sleepily in his hair, relaxing completely as Hannibal undid his shorts, parting the fabric to take his thickening cock into his mouth.

He gave Will a few deep sucks, then pulled away to lick his lips with an arched eyebrow. “What did you do?”

With a start, Will remembered the fucking peach. What he’d done to himself. He blushed hotly as Hannibal reached out to pick up the raped peach from the end table, amusement touching the corners of his eyes.

“Is this what I think it is?” Will nodded shamefully, his breathing coming in rasps. “You tried out the plant kingdom? What’s next, Will? Minerals? Are you rejecting the animal kingdom entirely? Me?”

“I’m sick, aren’t I?” Will asked softly, burying his face in his hands, but only enough that he could still take in Hannibal’s expression.

He didn’t look disgusted at all. In fact, he looked… curious. “I wish everyone was as sick as you,” he sighed. “Want to see sick?” he asked with a laugh.

Will watched him in mock horror as he bit into the raped fruit, juices and… come spilling across his lips. Will’s mouth parted in horror as Hannibal boldly licked the wetness from his lips, humming in pleasure. “The peach adds something to your taste,” he said clinically, biting into the fruit again, then licking deep where Will had fucked it. “Though I think you taste better by yourself.”

“Please,” Will whimpered. “You don’t have to do this to me. I told you I wouldn’t tell anyone, and I won’t. I came after you. I wanted you. You don’t need… ammunition against me.”

“Is that what you think I’m doing?” Hannibal chuckled, biting into the peach again. “I wanted you since day one, Will. I was just better at hiding it.”

“Stop eating that,” Will pleaded, face flaming as his blush spread down his neck. “Please. Hannibal, please.” His eyes welled with tears, and Hannibal set the rest of the fruit aside to hug Will close.

Will latched onto him immediately, pressing his face into his neck through a sob. “I don’t want you to go,” he choked out. “I hate that we have an expiration date. I can’t… I can’t picture myself without you, now.”

Hannibal held him close, threading his fingers through his curls. “Whatever happens between us, Will, I just want you to know…”

Will waited, pressing a kiss to his neck. “What?”

Hannibal pulled away from him, his own eyes watering, yet no tears fell. “Don’t ever say you didn’t know.”

Will shifted against the mattress, moving until he was straddling Hannibal’s waist. “Kiss me, Will,” Will pleaded.

“Hannibal,” his lover sighed, closing his eyes as Will’s lips touched his own. Their tongues met, and Will could taste himself there, combined with the sweetness of the peach. The kiss deepened, Hannibal moaning as Will shifted over him purposefully. Will pulled away, licking Hannibal’s top lip suggestively. “I want to know what you taste like,” he said softly.

“You…” Hannibal groaned, closing his eyes. “You can’t. You can’t say things like that to me.”

“Please,” Will pleaded, grinding down against the thick line of his cock in his shorts.

“Not here,” Hannibal said weakly, letting Will press him back against the dirty mattress with his palm.

“No one comes up here,” Will promised. “Well, you’re about to. But no one else.”

The throaty little laugh from Hannibal made Will smile, and he tugged his shorts down his legs. His thick cock slapped up against his abdomen, and Will’s mouth watered. “Last chance to tell me no,” he said gravelly.

“I can’t,” Hannibal sighed, watching Will grip his cock in his fist and stroke him slowly. “I can’t say no to you.”

“Sounds like a ‘go ahead’ to me,” Will laughed. He licked the wet head of his cock, rolling it against his tongue. He tasted salty and musky, almost chlorine-like. It was perfect. It was perfect because it was Hannibal.

He wrapped his lips around the head, sucking him gently while descending down the shaft. Hannibal went up on his elbows to watch him, and Will chanced a glance up at him, moaning with his mouth full at the sight of Hannibal’s darkened eyes.

The damp pout of his mouth as he panted.

He sucked harder, taking Hannibal as deep in his throat as he could. The head of his cock breached the back of his throat, and he choked while pulling back, eyes watering in surprise. “Your eyes, Will,” Hannibal said in awe while stroking his cheek. “You’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

Will hummed around him, descending down his thick cock again with his mouth. Hannibal moaned, his head rolling back in pleasure. It took a while for him to come, but Will didn’t mind a single moment of it. Every reaction from Hannibal was saved in his mind. The way the sunlight slanted through the window, orangey light making Hannibal’s eyes look like honey. The way his taut stomach contracted with each suck of his cock. The way gentle fingers held his face and ruffled through his curls.

When Hannibal came, it was more than Will thought it would be. He choked again, some come spilling from his lips down Hannibal's shaft. He swallowed quickly, licking the mess with the flat of his tongue as if trying not to waste a single fucking drop of him.

Hannibal tugged him towards the bed, rolling him until he was on his back while tearing his shorts down his thighs. His cock sprang free, and Hannibal licked down his chest, sucking his cock down his throat quickly.

Will moaned, lacing his fingers through Hannibal's hair while he pumped his cock with his mouth. It felt so good. Too good. Hannibal took him so deeply that his lips brushed the base of his cock, Will's eyes fluttering shut as he felt the head breach Hannibal's throat.

He came more quickly than he meant to, the warm wet of Hannibal's mouth too pleasurable to hold on. Hannibal took all of him easily, swallowing quickly, before letting him go. Soft kisses were trailed up his chest, and Will laughed as Hannibal tugged him up to kiss his mouth, holding his face gently in his hands.

Hannibal trailed kisses to each cheek, then his nose. His forehead. Will closed his eyes and basked in it, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's neck. "Are you… are you going out tonight?"

"No," he said, still laving Will's skin with kisses. "I plan to be at the house, like most nights."

The admission made no sense to Will. Hannibal was almost never at the house. He bit his lip and shrugged, letting the comment go.

Chapter End Notes

Some of you might have noticed that there are some quotes from Chuck Palahniuk's Invisible Monsters in this story. I forgot to mention that earlier, because... well, I forgot. haha.

Some of the quotes are too perfect for Will in this story, and it might be my favorite novel of all time so I'm giving it some love in this story that I also love.

Thank you guys! Your response to this has been amazing. By the time this is done, I think we're looking at 120K words. I know. SORRY.

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Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> Brief mention of AIDS in this chapter. I LOVED CMBYN, but... it always kind of irked me that the pandemic wasn't even mentioned in passing in any part of the movie or book. I get that it was a romance, but it seems crazy to me that two men go bareback during a time when a disease was killing people in droves without even having a casual discussion about it.
>
> 1983 was also the first year where it was called AIDS instead of GRID - Gay Related Immune Deficiency. I won't get into details about it in the story, I just felt it was something that should be touched upon.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They headed downstairs after a bit, each heading to their own rooms to gather clothes for dinner, then taking showers separately. Will wanted nothing more than to take a shower with him, but that was too risky. Anyone could come in. Anyone would know immediately that they were together.

A few of his parents' friends came for dinner, and Will couldn't speak German, so much of the dinner went over his head. Hannibal pressed his bare foot under Will's at the table, each sharing a secret smile as they ate, completely lost in themselves while the conversation continued.

After the sun set over the horizon, his parents headed inside with their friends while he and Hannibal remained at the picnic table, sharing a bottle of rosatello. The air was sweet from the rhododendrons around them, milky twilight punctuated by the slow blink of a thousand lightning bugs around them. "I want to show you where I go sometimes," Hannibal said softly.

"So take me," Will smiled.

They finished their glasses of wine just as the moon crested over the treetops, casting the entire orchard in silver light. Hannibal took Will's hand in his, navigating him through the garden at the side of the house. Trees surrounded them on all sides, moonlight filtering weakly through their canopy. Here, the scent of Rhododendron mixed with the lavender fields behind them as well as sweet grass and gardenia.

Hannibal pulled Will up onto the stone wall surrounding the garden, walking along its edge until they were in a hidden part of it that was surrounded by two trees on either side of the wall.

The wall rose and fell in arches, and Hannibal nestled himself in one of them like he was laying in a hammock. It was peaceful out here, no light at all aside from the window lights of the villa through the trees. Moonlight spilled across the rose garden around them, fog rolling in from the surrounding woods. “You come here?” he asked in surprise while standing at the peak of the rock wall over Hannibal.

“I come here,” Hannibal agreed. “You should come here, too,” he laughed, making grabby hands towards Will.

Will laughed, slipping down the arch so his legs straddled Hannibal’s, though they each relaxed opposite one another. “I can’t believe all those nights I thought you were out drinking or… or…”

“Or?”

“Or with Chiara, you were actually right here.”

“I’ve only spent two nights with Chiara,” Hannibal said softly, stroking Will’s knee where it rested over his thigh. “Once when we went dancing, once when we were here.”

“Did you…” Will bit his lip, looking away pointedly.

“Sleep with her?” Hannibal finished. Will nodded, and Hannibal shook his head. “No. *That’s* what you thought I was doing?”

“I didn’t know what you were doing,” Will admitted.

“Do I give off that vibe, Will? That I sleep around?” he wondered.

Will sat up, shifting his weight closer and Hannibal did the same. Hannibal's hands were splayed wide on his thighs, making Will shiver from his touch. “You give off a vibe that you’re someone who knows who they are, and what they like, and where their life is going. You give off a vibe that you do exactly as you please, regardless of what people think.”

“And that’s a bad thing?” Hannibal asked, mouthing gently at Will’s jawline.

“No,” he sighed. “It’s just… I don’t know what that’s like. I don’t know who I am, yet.”

“Well, I know who you are, Will,” he said, gripping Will’s waist to haul him closer. Will cupped his neck in his hands, laving kisses against his throat.

“I don’t think you do,” Will chuckled, biting his lip while pulling away.

“You’re me, and I’m you,” Hannibal breathed, licking into Will’s mouth once before pulling away again.

Will laughed, “Okay. I’m you,” he agreed with a shrug.

“What are you thinking about, then?” Hannibal wondered.

Will smiled, tipping his head back as Hannibal pressed kisses down the column of his neck. “I’m Hannibal, and I’m thinking about… how I have to leave here in three weeks,” he said brokenheartedly. Hannibal hummed in agreement, and he continued. “I’m thinking about going back to the States. My book. You,” he laughed.

“Always you,” he agreed, pressing another kiss to Will’s cheek. “What else?”

“In three weeks, I’ll be back in… back in Colombia,” Will sighed. “It pains me to think about it, but at least I’ll be away from here. Away from the memories where I can… forget about them.”

“You think I’m going to forget?” Hannibal said angrily, tugging Will’s jaw up so their eyes met. “I will never, ever, forget you. *Never*. You’re right that… that I am relieved that I won’t have to be surrounded by things that remind me of you. I don’t think I could take it.”

“What about me?” Will asked softly. “You’re me. What are you thinking about?”

“You,” Hannibal replied immediately, making Will laugh. They shared a kiss, chaste, but intimate. “I’m thinking about my last year of high school. I’m thinking about… what I’m doing afterwards. It’s not piano or art. It’s not history or archaeology. It’s something else, and I’m ashamed of it. Even though I shouldn’t be.”

Will swallowed thickly, pulling away with a frown. “How do you know?”

“Because I’m you,” Hannibal grinned, kissing his cheek for good measure. “I think my parents won’t be proud of me if I do something that they’ve never done, but… I’d be wrong. I am so lucky to have two parents that encourage me in anything I want to do, though I don’t know it yet.”

“You lived with your aunt and uncle after your parents passed,” Will recalled softly. “Were they kind?”

“No,” Hannibal replied immediately, one arm banding around Will’s waist while Will’s arms went around his neck to keep him close. “They… they haven’t accepted anything I’ve wanted to do. They haven’t accepted me for who I am. Not in *anything*, Will.”

“You’re going to be a psychiatrist, right?” Will asked. The hair at the nape of his neck was so soft it felt like Will was touching nothing at all.

Hannibal nodded. “I haven’t decided if I want to practice yet, or if I want to teach. I think… I think I want to teach.”

“We wasted so many days,” Will said softly, kissing Hannibal’s upper lip by wrapping his lips around it to give it a gentle suck. “So many days, Hannibal.”

“Wasted?” Hannibal repeated doubtfully. “I wouldn’t say that. This experience has been… incredible. Even though I’ve spent most nights out here, trying to keep my hands off of you.”

“Is *that* why?” Will laughed, kissing his collar bone because it was there. “Is it?”

“That’s why I’ve been out here,” Hannibal chuckled, fingers gliding under Will’s tee shirt to skim across his bare spine. “Hearing you move around in the bedroom. The little noises you make when you dream… it was too much. You’re too much. I couldn’t believe that there were no girls throwing themselves at your feet. You are absolutely stunning, and you are so *brilliant*, Will. You have so much potential. I can’t wait to see how far you go in your life, beloved.”

Will didn’t want to think about how far he’d go with Hannibal absent from his life. “Why didn’t you tell me when you first got here? Give me a sign?”

“A sign?” he asked distractedly, pressing slow kisses over Will’s jawline.

“That you liked me,” Will clarified, unbuttoning Hannibal’s shirt until he could slide his fingers inside to feel his chest hair.

“I did,” Hannibal laughed, kissing his cheek again. “At least, well. I *tried* to.”

“When?” Will asked indignantly while his fingers took a walk along Hannibal’s bare chest.

“The day we were playing volleyball,” he said softly. “I touched you… just as a way of showing you that… that I *liked* you. The way you reacted was like I’d molested you, and… I decided to keep my distance. For my own good, really.”

“I pulled away because…” Will blushed, tipping his face down to hide it. Gentle fingers gripped his chin, lifting his face until their eyes met again. “I got hard. You touched me, and I got hard.”

“Will,” Hannibal breathed, leaning forward to kiss him again. Their kiss turned heated, their tongues sweeping possessively through one another’s mouths as Hannibal gripped his thighs to haul him up into his lap. Will followed him as he laid flat on the rock wall, their chests pressed tight as they ground against one another while exchanging heated kisses.

“Is there someone waiting for you at home?” Will asked, though he very seriously didn’t want to know the answer.

Hannibal held his face tenderly, holding his gaze. “No. No one else. Not for a while, now.”

Relief tore through Will like a tornado, and he kiss Hannibal harder. Deeper. Trying his best to claim him in the only way he knew how.

“We should go upstairs,” Hannibal gasped, arching his back as Will trailed kisses down his throat, undoing the rest of the buttons on his shirt so he could suckle a nipple into his mouth. “Will, please.”

He laughed, rocking back on Hannibal’s thighs before coming to his feet. He helped Hannibal to his, then they crept upstairs, hand in hand.

Neither of them bothered with the premise that either of them was sleeping anywhere other than in Hannibal’s room. It was risky to hold hands in the house. Even more risky to be intimate this early in the evening.

It didn't stop them from stripping their shirts, each grabbing fistfuls of one another as they tumbled onto the bed. "Inside me," Will pleaded.

"Too soon," Hannibal sighed, mouthing down the column of his neck with long swipes of his tongue.

"Please," Will pleaded, lifting his hips as Hannibal tugged his shorts off his legs. Their arms were in the way of each other, as Will was trying to get his shorts off, too.

Soon they were blessedly skin to skin, each rocking against one another while licking into one another's mouths. Hannibal trailed kisses down his bare chest, pausing to suckle each nipple. Will arched his back, pressing himself into Hannibal's mouth the best he could, and Hannibal moaned. "So beautiful," he sighed, spanning his hand across Will's belly. "Will, you're beautiful."

"Make love to me," Will pleaded, hiking his thighs around Hannibal's waist. Hannibal let out a little noise, pressing his forehead against Will's belly. "Hannibal, make love to me."

"You will tell me to stop if it hurts," he said softly. "Promise me."

"I promise," he gasped, hiking his legs higher up his waist.

The little tube of lubrication came back out, and he watched Hannibal slicken his fingers carefully before circling Will's entrance just as gently. Will winced, as he still felt… a little sore. He didn't want to stop, though. "I want you to finish inside of me," he whispered, leaning forward to smear a kiss against Hannibal's cheekbone. "I want you inside of me all day tomorrow. At breakfast, you'll know your come is in me. You'll know it. Will you be able to smell it?"

Hannibal shivered, fingering Will with two fingers, now. "I'll be able to smell it," he agreed, eyes darkened to mahogany. "You can't go to breakfast smelling of sex, Will."

He laughed, wincing as another finger began stretching him open. It didn't seem like as much work this time. "I'll shower," he shrugged. "But I won't wash you out of me."

"Fuck," Hannibal groaned, hips thrusting into thin air, his heavy cock dribbling between his thighs. "Will please."

Will kissed him as he withdrew his fingers, then leaned back on his elbows to watch him slick his ruddy cock with more lube. Their eyes met as Hannibal pressed in, the pain of it only an echo of what it was the night before. He was still sore enough that he winced, and Hannibal immediately leaned forward to press kisses against his cheek, then his forehead. "Are you alright?" he asked softly, once he was buried as deeply inside of Will as he was meant to be.

"Good," he breathed, nodding his head. "It's good."

Their chests met as Hannibal began slowly thrusting into him, each movement sparking lightning against his insides. He felt so full of him like this. Like there was no end to them at

all.

As if they were one living thing.

Hannibal hoisted his knees under his forearms as he did the night before, and this time it was pleasurable more than anything else. That spot inside of him was struck with each movement Hannibal made, and his cock pulsed and leaked against his abdomen with each strike against it.

Their lips met, gasping breaths panted into one another's opened mouths as Hannibal's pace picked up, their skin clapping gently with each snap of his hips. Will cupped his face in his hands, stroking his fingers against the sharp edges of his cheekbones, which lifted with Hannibal's smile as he turned his head to press a kiss against his palm.

"Do I feel good?" Will asked with a gasp, arching his back when Hannibal wrapped his fingers around his cock to stroke him in time with his pace.

"Good?" Hannibal asked breathlessly, then bit gently against Will's jawline. "No, Will. You feel *exquisite*."

Will moaned, shocked when Hannibal banded his arms around his waist to lift him into his lap. It changed everything as he settled over him, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's neck to keep him close.

He felt deeper, somehow. They felt closer. Will lifted himself experimentally and dropped back into his lap, each sighing in pleasure at how perfect it felt. He pressed a kiss against Hannibal's neck, then his shoulder, tipping his face into the nape of Hannibal's throat. "Will," he breathed against Hannibal's ear, biting his lip when he watched gooseflesh rise as he said it. "Will, Will," he sighed.

"Hannibal," his lover responded, gripping his ass to spread him wide open while he thrust up inside of him more vigorously.

He couldn't hold on anymore, his gut clenched tight to prevent himself from spilling. Every movement Hannibal made brought a pleasure so intense it felt like he was lit up from the inside.

He spilled between them, his cock jerking hard enough that come splashed under Hannibal's chin against his throat. Hannibal moaned as Will leaned in to lick him clean, sweeping his own spend off Hannibal's skin with the flat of his tongue.

He left it there, offering it to Hannibal with a parted mouth. His lover moaned, eyes shifting first to Will's face, then the come on his tongue before he leaned in and kissed Will as though he wanted to devour him.

He felt Hannibal's cock twitch inside of him the moment Hannibal tasted him, hot come spilling deep as Hannibal pressed himself inside of Will as far as he could go.

Hannibal's arms banded around his waist, holding him tight once they were finished. He stayed right where he was, their mouths nuzzling affectionately while he stayed buried inside.

"Stay with me tonight," Hannibal whispered pleadingly, peppering kisses against his collarbone. "Stay."

"Yes," Will sighed, wrapping him in a hug while kissing the side of his neck. "Yes."

They didn't bother with clothes. Hannibal got up to clean his chest in the bathroom, then brought the face cloth out to gently clean what had spilled out of Will's body with the same cloth. Hannibal laid in the bed with moonlight streaming through the opened window, casting them both in icy light. Will was pressed along his side, letting his fingers touch every inch of Hannibal's chest. His neck. His flawless face.

Hannibal was simply watching him, his own fingers trailing over Will's bare spine. "Do you still talk to your aunt and uncle?" he asked softly.

Hannibal shook his head. "I haven't spoken to them since I told my uncle I was going into psychiatry. He wanted me to be a politician. A mayor, representative, something. I never wanted it."

Will smiled, biting his lip as Hannibal grasped his wrist to kiss the pads of his fingers. "I can picture you at a podium," Will laughed. "You'd be dressed impeccably, hair neat and combed, gelled down to prevent any fly-aways."

"Can you?" Hannibal chuckled, stretching gently against the mattress. "I wouldn't enjoy that life."

"I don't think you would, no," Will agreed.

"By adopting me, they assumed they'd acquired a subordinate," Hannibal said, eyes far away. "They told me how to dress, how to act. They sent me to boarding schools to make sure I was exactly who they wanted me to be, hoping I would never have the autonomy to decide for myself."

"What did they say when you said you wanted to go into psychiatry?" he asked.

"That I could do as I pleased," Hannibal recalled with a frown, "but that they would not help me pay for it. It was no concern of mine. I have an inheritance from my parents that I was able to get when I turned 18. I don't need them, anymore."

He couldn't imagine that. Not needing his own parents. He relied on them heavily, even with day-to-day issues. Harrison was his mentor, even if Will wanted different things for his own life. What Will wanted was to find the sense of quiet peace his dad felt throughout his day. He wanted that feeling that he was doing some good in the world, in his own way.

"Are there cases of… the pandemic here?" Hannibal asked suddenly.

“AIDS?” Will asked softly.

“Yes,” he nodded.

“Not yet,” Will admitted, swallowing thickly while considering that question. “You’ve never been with a man before me.”

“Never,” Hannibal agreed. “I’ve had a few… girlfriends in the States, but no one in quite some time while I was in college.”

“Why did you ask me that?” Will asked hesitantly.

“Just wanted to know,” Hannibal shrugged. “It’s everywhere, back home. My… my aunt and uncle have said numerous times that gay men asked for this. They… deserved it, even. I don’t even think I’m attracted to women at all, but… it’s safer, isn’t it?”

“You just fucked me, Hannibal,” Will said ruefully.

“We know we’re safe,” Hannibal pointed out. “When… when I leave, promise me that you’ll be safe.”

“I don’t want to talk about you leaving me,” Will blurted fiercely. “I don’t even want to think about it.”

“Alright,” Hannibal said gently, stroking his fingers through Will’s curls. “I just… worry for you.”

“Don’t,” Will pleaded, hiding his face in Hannibal’s throat. A tendril of anxiety wove through him, forcing him to his elbow so he could look Hannibal in the eyes. “Promise me that you’ll be safe,” he begged, tears blurring his vision. “Promise me that you won’t… get sick.”

“I can’t imagine being with anyone after you,” Hannibal said thickly, gentle fingers stroking down the skin of Will’s throat. “I can’t even picture it. I will be safe, Will. I promise you that.”

Will leaned forward to kiss him, sealing the promise the only way he knew how to. Hannibal held him closer, each settling in to sleep, even though it was the furthest thing from his mind at the moment. “I wish I could take you with me,” Hannibal said softly. “I wish… it didn’t have to be so hard.”

“I could come to you after high school,” Will said, his own voice clogged with tears. “I could find you.”

“You’re young,” Hannibal sighed. “You have a whole life ahead of you, beloved. Never shape your entire life around another person. Me included.”

Will pressed a kiss to his chest, holding him tight. It was impossible to explain that he was already shaped around Hannibal. When he left, there would be an empty space in Will that would be Hannibal’s exact shape. They were the same.

Hannibal seemed certain that Will would move on. He believed that because Will was young, that this was just a fling from Will's perspective. While the thought made him angry, it also depressed him. There was no way to show him. There was no way to say it without it looking like a desperate grab at keeping Hannibal in his life.

At some point, he drifted off. Safe in the circle of Hannibal's arms.

They each awoke early the next morning, and Will used the time to head into his temporary bedroom to muss up the bed as if he'd slept in it. He gathered a clean bathing suit, then headed for a cool shower that he purposefully kept short. He washed his hair and his armpits. His chest. His groin. He passed a quick hand over his entrance, making sure to leave as much of Hannibal behind as he could.

When he came out of the shower and headed back into his room, Hannibal's red shirt was at his desk on a hanger, a note attached to it. He went to it curiously, plucking the note off the wire hanger to read it.

'To Hannibal.
From Will.'

He smiled wide, pressing the note to his heart before tucking it away in his notebook. The wine-red button-down was ironed and cleaned, shifting in the light. He pulled it on, and there was enough material that he felt like he could wrap it around him twice. He bit his lip while doing up the buttons, leaving the top three undone and the shirt sleeves rolled to his elbows. The vivid red was stunning, even if it was billowy on him.

He heard Hannibal kick on the shower in the bathroom while he took in his reflection in the mirror. "I know you," he said to himself, smiling hesitantly while touching the soft fabric of the shirt. "You're not so bad."

He headed downstairs for breakfast immediately afterwards, making sure Hannibal came down after him with a gap in their arrivals. His mother pressed a kiss against his damp curls, ruffling them affectionately. "My beautiful boy," she smiled, pouring him a glass of juice.

"Morning," he smiled wide, closing his eyes when his mother touched his cheek.

"Beautiful when you're happy, Caro," she laughed. She headed back inside the house to get their breakfast with Mafalda, and his father set his paper down.

"You and Hannibal have been getting along?" he asked carefully.

"Yeah," Will shrugged, fiddling with his juice glass. "Well enough."

"He likes you," his father said out of nowhere, eyes traveling down to Will's new shirt for a moment.

"Did he say that?" Will chuckled, raising his eyes to meet his father's.

"He did," his dad chuckled.

Hannibal came down not a moment after, his own wide smile somewhat too joyous for the early morning table. “Morning!” he chirped, settling himself at the chair to Will’s left. A bare foot pressed under his own under the table, and Will bit back a smile as his mother and Mafalda came out with their breakfast.

After breakfast, Will made an announcement that he normally would never have made. “I’ll be by the pool,” he said casually. “If anyone’s looking for me.”

“Hannibal can join you this afternoon,” his dad said almost knowingly. “He’s got some things to do beforehand.”

With that, Hannibal and his dad retreated towards the study, and Will went upstairs to grab his sunglasses, book, and a towel.

When he came outside, he paused just as Marzia was rolling up on her bike. A sense of dread rolled over him as he watched her set it aside to walk over to him. “I haven’t heard from you,” she said softly.

“I’ve been… working?” Will said hesitantly.

Her eyes drifted over him, lingering on his billowy shirt that clearly didn’t belong to him. “Am I your girl, Will?”

No. The thought alone was repulsive, though he didn’t say as much. He tried to think of something to say. Anything that would lessen the heartache he could plainly see she was feeling in that moment.

He couldn’t think of a thing.

He watched tears well in her eyes before she turned and jogged back to her bike. He watched her pedal down the road, and he felt… guilty.

He never ended up touching the book he’d intended to read. Instead, he sat by the wall around the pool, dangling his feet in the water. Hannibal was only here another few weeks. After that, he’d have… nothing. Marzia was done with him. He had no real friends, and the few he had he’d avoided the entire time Hannibal had been here.

He knew already that it would make the loss of him more profound. It made him anxious to think about where he would be in three weeks. Less than three weeks, now.

“Why so glum?” Hannibal asked, walking up to the pool in nothing but his red swim trunks. Will let his eyes trail over him, biting his lip as Hannibal sat by his side, dipping his feet in the water.

“Marzia came by,” Will said softly. “I hurt her. I… broke her heart.”

“Ah,” Hannibal said, biting his lip as he considered it. “The thing about broken hearts is that they always mend, Will. One way or another, people always find it in them to move on.”

“Are you talking about Marzia, or me?” he asked softly, turning his face so he could take in Hannibal’s expression.

“Everyone,” Hannibal clarified. “The whole world.”

The statement hurt him, whether Hannibal intended it to or not. It implied that Hannibal would move on from him. That he’d… mend. However Greek tragedy it sounded, Will didn’t want him to mend. He wanted Hannibal to ache for him for the rest of his life.

“I think I’m going out tonight,” he said with a shrug. “With my friends. I haven’t spent enough time with them, and… I should keep them close.”

“Oh,” Hannibal said after a beat. “Well. If that’s what you would like, then that’s what you should do.”

“You could come with me,” Will offered. “You’ve spent time with us before.”

“I could,” he said cautiously. “The question is whether or not you want me to.”

“I want you to,” Will whispered.

Hannibal glanced around quickly, taking in how isolated they were before threading his fingers into Will’s curls, pulling him in for a short, chaste, kiss. “Then I go with you,” he said simply.

It was still early, so they took a dip in the pool together, for which Will had to remove Billowy from his shoulders. It was fine, because while in the pool, Hannibal crowded him against the wall, licking into his mouth as though he’d been dying to do it. Will wrapped his legs around his waist, threading his fingers through Hannibal’s wet hair as their kiss went from gentle to heated.

Sunshine beat down on them as they rocked against one another, and Will pulled away with a start. “Not here,” he breathed. “Anyone could walk over.”

Hannibal blinked, licking the flavor of Will from his lips as his surrounding came back to him. “Fuck,” he sighed, moving away to the other side of the pool, opposite Will. “I forget myself around you.”

Will grinned, letting his legs float up in the water, extending his feet toward Hannibal. Hannibal laughed in response, holding the ledge of the pool as he let his feet float up towards Will, too.

Their feet touched beneath the cool water, and it was enough.

“Where have you been!?” Paulo bellowed, cigarette smoke pluming out of his nose as he and Hannibal met his friends at the plaza for drinks in town later that night. “We thought you’d died!”

“Not dead,” Will laughed, taking a glass of wine from his hand as Antony ruffled his curls. “Just busy.”

“Busy with what, darling?” Antony wondered, lighting his cigarette with the tip of Paulo’s.

“Helping my dad,” Will shrugged. “Helping my mom. It’s harvesting season.”

“Don’t you have people that do that?” Paulo asked as they all picked a table at the outside pub, Hannibal choosing a seat as far away from him as possible.

“Anchise isn’t getting any younger,” Will shrugged again.

Marzia and Chaira came shortly afterwards, though Marzia stayed as far from Will as possible, too. Chiara on the other hand went straight for Hannibal, practically sitting in his lap when she moved a chair as close to him as possible. “How’re you finding Lombardy, Dr. Lecter?” she asked coyly.

“Wonderful,” he laughed, and Will chugged his drink while watching the blush rise in his cheeks. “Not a doctor yet, though.”

He caught up with his friends, but… his eyes were on Hannibal, who was dancing alone on the cobblestone street surrounded by other people. Women noticed him. He watched them slide their greedy eyes over him, then venture closer. “I need to have him before he leaves,” Chiara moaned, sipping her glass of wine.

“So have him,” Paulo laughed, flicking his ashes to the street. “Go get him, Chiara,” he teased.

Will watched in dismay as she sauntered over, intentionally letting her dress strap fall from her slender shoulder while dancing towards him. Hannibal smiled, waving her over for a dance that she happily stepped into. He wished he could wander over, Billowy falling from his shoulder to entice Hannibal closer. It was a pipe dream in every way that it could be.

“Didn’t know you were into her,” Paulo said, refilling Will’s fifth empty glass with more wine. “Sorry, mate. I wouldn’t have sent her after him if I knew.”

“S’fine,” Will slurred, reaching out for Paulo’s cigarette. He puffed it and choked, handing it back with a wave of his hand. “Shit is gross,” he laughed.

“You want to dance, Will?” Antony asked softly.

Will pursed his lips, sliding his eyes over his long-time friend slowly. Antony was leaning into him, resting his arm against the back of Will’s chair. Invading his space. His eyes were overly glassy, signaling that he might have had more than too much to drink, too.

Antony was hitting on him. It was a slow realization, but he did eventually notice it.

“No,” he said softly, wincing as the next sip of wine he took didn’t sit quite right. “Don’t think I can, right now.”

Antony smiled, leaning into Will a little further. A hand carded through his curls, and he closed his eyes.

“Don’t,” he whispered, shaking his head.

“Just a kiss,” Antony laughed, stroking down the column of Will’s neck.

“I said no,” he repeated, rolling his head back to put some distance between them.

Antony’s breath smelled of cigarettes and wine, and he turned his face away as Antony smeared a kiss against his cheek. “Just *one* kiss,” he laughed. “It’s not a big deal.”

A firm hand gripped his elbow, hauling him out of his seat. “We’re heading home,” Hannibal said sternly, glaring fire down at Antony. “No means no, dickhead.”

“Just a kiss,” Antony laughed, slumping back in his seat. “Meant nothing by it!”

“He’s pissed,” Paulo laughed, shaking his head. “Sorry, mate.”

“Want me to follow you back?” Chiara asked coyly, stroking down Hannibal’s bicep with her fingers. “You can put him to bed, and you and I could-”

“*No*,” Hannibal said firmly. “Not while I’m a guest in someone else’s house. Have a good night.”

Will leaned into him, the entire world swaying and moving as though he were standing on a boat. “M’drunk,” he laughed.

“I can see that,” Hannibal said gruffly. “How the fuck am I getting you home like this?” he wondered, staring at their bikes with a grimace.

“Looks like we’re walking,” Will shrugged, picking up his bike to walk it down the street. He stumbled a few times, but he could manage. “Let’s go, Hannibal.”

They were silent as they walked slowly through the town, then into the wooded area just outside of it. The river ran along beside them, the moon hanging low over the water. Crickets gave them something other than silence to listen to, at least.

“Is Antony your friend?” Hannibal asked suddenly.

“Not really,” Will shrugged, stumbling on something in the road. Or maybe nothing at all, given his inebriation. “He’s Paulo’s friend.”

“Never, ever, be alone with him when you’re drunk,” Hannibal said vehemently. “Never, Will. *Promise* me.”

“I promise,” Will chuckled.

Hannibal’s bike dropped to the ground suddenly, the sound loud and startling as Hannibal grasped his elbow to turn Will towards him. “Look at me,” he demanded.

Will's eyes lifted to meet his, though he looked somewhat blurry. "*Never* be alone with him. He doesn't know what the word 'no' means, and guys like that…" Hannibal huffed, shaking his head. "Guys like that will take advantage."

"I don't want him," Will slurred, shaking his head. "I would punch him in the face if he tried."

"You won't be alone with him anyway," Hannibal repeated firmly. "Right?"

"Right," Will nodded.

Hannibal picked his bike back up, and they walked home.

Hannibal helped him up the stairs when they got back, as the wine was hitting him fully by then. They went into Hannibal's room, where Hannibal helped him remove Billowy, then hoisted him into the bathroom where Will relieved himself. "I'm pissing in front of you," he laughed.

"Everyone pisses," Hannibal said gruffly.

He turned Will after he finished pissing, closing the lid on the flushing toilet to put him down on it. "Why did you get drunk like this?" Hannibal asked while rinsing a clean face cloth with cold water.

Will braced himself against the wall, closing his eyes. "You're going to make someone a lucky girl one day," Will slurred. "You'll be a good husband to them."

"Why do you *do* this?" he asked, voice pained while he tipped Will's face up with his fingertips. A cool cloth cleaned the sweat from his face and neck, and Will sighed at how good it felt. "Why can't you just be with me in the moment? Enjoy this while we have it?"

"How can I?" Will asked miserably. "I can't touch you in front of anyone. I can't kiss you. I have to watch other people dance with you, knowing that I am not allowed to do the same. Our moments are stolen. Dust particles in the wind."

"That's the cards we were dealt," Hannibal sighed. "That's what we can have, Will. I'd rather have a few stolen moments with you in our day than have nothing of you at all."

"While you're here," Will said slowly, holding Hannibal's waist in his hands to tug him forward. He pressed a kiss over his soft cock through his slacks, and Hannibal sighed. "While you're here, no more nights out with other people. You're mine and mine alone. Okay?"

"Yours," Hannibal agreed softly.

Soft lips pressed against his, and his eyelids fluttered shut when Hannibal licked into his mouth. He gripped Hannibal's waist tighter, wishing Hannibal were buried deep inside of his body.

His stomach rolled, and Will pulled away with a start. “Gonna,” he said quickly, and Hannibal grabbed him to hoist him up before flipping the lid of the toilet open.

Will heaved, puking up too many glasses of wine while Hannibal carded his fingers through Will’s curls. Will flushed the toilet, staying over it because he knew he wasn’t done, yet. “Go,” he said miserably. “You don’t need to see this.”

“I’m fine right where I am, beloved,” Hannibal sighed, pressing a kiss to his bare shoulder.

Hannibal went downstairs shortly afterwards to get Will a glass of water, returning to tuck Will into his own bed this time. “Want to be with you,” he mumbled sleepily.

“I’ll stay till you fall asleep,” Hannibal promised, holding Will close as they laid together on the twin bed.

“Love you,” Will breathed, kissing his throat, then his cheek. “Love you, love you.”

Hannibal held him tighter, and he felt wetness against the side of his face where Hannibal’s rested against him. “Sleep,” Hannibal said gruffly.

Will fell asleep as if on command. His last thought was that it sounded like Hannibal was crying.

Chapter End Notes

So now we KNOW Hannibal wasn't out screwing Chiara or anyone else. He's a maudlin asshat who gets drunk in gardens at night while pining for Will. I like to imagine he's looking up at Will's bedroom window, aching because he wants to know what he's doing.

They're going to start being more open with one another from here on out, so get ready for some smutty schmoop.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He woke up to a knock against his bedroom door, and Will scowled while burying his face into his pillow to protect his eyes from the light. “What?” he asked miserably. His stomach hurt from puking his guts out the night before, and his throat felt like sandpaper.

His dad crept into the room, looking ultimately disappointed. “Hannibal was telling me that you missed breakfast because you were hungover,” he said reproachfully. “You know better than to drink in excess.”

“Please,” Will pleaded, licking his dry lips. “Can we do this later?”

“We’ll do it now, I think,” his dad decided. He sat at the edge of Will’s bed, and Will sighed. “You worried Hannibal,” he said softly. “He had to get you home and make sure you didn’t choke on your own vomit. That’s not like you, Will.”

“One time,” Will argued exhaustedly. “It happened one time, and it won’t happen again.”

“You’re right it won’t,” his dad agreed. “I think for a few weeks, no more alcohol at all. How does that sound?”

“Good,” Will conceded with a laugh. “It’s terrible.”

“When you do this, it sure is,” his dad smiled. “So, tell me why you did.”

Will shrugged, blinking up at him blearily. “I… I don’t want Hannibal to leave.”

His dad sighed, glancing away from Will to look at Billowy resting over the back of his desk chair. “You two have a beautiful friendship,” he said carefully. “Instead of numbing the moments when you’re with him because he’s leaving, try embracing them instead. Hold onto them, Will. Life is too short to numb yourself when you feel happy or sad. Be present. Be in the moment, wide-eyed and aware. Someday, all you’ll have are the memories that you’ve made. Make sure they’re good ones.”

Will’s eyes welled with tears, but he nodded. “Rest,” his dad suggested. “I’ll have Mafalda bring you… what’s that thing they’re doing in the States called? With the blended fruit and yogurt?”

“A smoothie,” Will laughed.

“I will have her bring you a smoothie, and some aspirin.”

“Dad?” he said softly, making him pause by the door. “Love you.”

His dad smiled, and he nodded his head. “Love you, Will.”

He felt marginally better after his peach and apricot smoothie and a few aspirin in his bloodstream. He headed downstairs after brushing his teeth and having a shower, then grabbed a bottled water before heading off to the lake. His afternoon was quiet, and he napped on and off while laying on his towel under the shade of a willow tree.

By the time Hannibal found him, he was feeling much better. “You look good,” Hannibal said, folding to the grass with his legs crossed by Will’s side. “Sorry I told your parents. They wanted to know where you were for breakfast, and I didn’t know what to say.”

“It’s fine,” Will said, stretching lazily against the towel. Hannibal’s eyes trailed over him as he stretched out, and he smiled. “My dad talked to me. I am not allowed to drink at all for a few weeks.”

“Good move,” Hannibal chuckled, turning his eyes from Will’s bare chest out towards the still waters of the lake.

“I had already come to that decision on my own, thank you very much,” Will snarked.

“Wise of you,” Hannibal chuckled.

They stayed silent for a few minutes, just watching the lake quietly. There was a swan on the far side, and he and Hannibal watched it glide across the glass surface of the water.

“Tell me something that no one knows about you,” Hannibal demanded softly.

“I want to be an FBI profiler,” he said immediately, blushing when Hannibal turned to him in surprise. “They’re incredible. I’ve read so many books based on them. Robert Ressler is my favorite profiler. He’s… incredible. In four years, he interviewed thirty-six incarcerated serial killers, compiling a sort-of data base on their similarities. It’s so interesting to read about. How… similar their lives are. How much their outside circumstances have influenced who they became.”

“I remember him on tv,” Hannibal said with a smile. “When they caught Ted Bundy.”

“He’s an absolute badass,” Will laughed, smiling wide while thinking of it. “I think I’d be good at it, too. I’m very good at reading people, which is something all profilers have in common.”

“Read me,” Hannibal said with a laugh, moving behind Will so he rested in his lap. Hannibal’s legs splayed out on either side of Will’s body, his head resting on his thigh.

“Why would I do that?” Will asked, smiling up at him coyly. “You’re me. I know me already.”

“I am you,” Hannibal decided, smiling wide while touching the side of Will’s face.

“I just… I *like* transcribing music. I do,” he shrugged noncommittally. “It’s not… it’s not who I *am*, though. I can feel it. I was meant for something else, but I really don’t know what that

something else is, yet. I want to save lives, Hannibal. I want to be the man that people turn to when there's no evidence. When there's no motive."

"You have big plans, then," Hannibal said softly, glancing back out over the water. His facial expression changed a bit, a solemness to his features that Will couldn't really understand.

"Don't you?" he countered.

A muscle jumped in Hannibal's neck, and he pointedly did not look at Will when he responded. "I do."

After a few minutes, a gentle hand traced his jawline again, and Hannibal's gaze returned to him. He loved when Hannibal looked at him like this. Like he didn't know where to look. Like all of him was a temptation in its own way, even if the reason why eluded Will entirely. "Do you remember what you said to me last night?" he asked suddenly.

Will blinked up at him, sitting up so he could face him better. "No?"

"When we got home," he said softly, eyes shifting over his face. "When we got into bed."

"I don't remember coming home, aside from puking my guts out," Will laughed, blushing to the tips of his ears. "Did I say something rude? Stupid?"

"No," Hannibal said immediately, working his bottom lip between his teeth. "Nothing like that. You'd had too much to drink. That's all."

"What did I say?"

"Nothing," he sighed. "It was nothing. A few too many drinks," he laughed, but it sounded forced.

"Did I say something elicit?" he wondered. The truth certainly came out when he was drinking. "Did I say something… that I… was thinking about?"

Hannibal's eyes flashed at him; his head tilted curiously. "What would that something be, I wonder?"

Will was certain it was that. In his drunken state, he told Hannibal something that disgusted him. "That I wanted to make love to you?"

His eyes widened, mouth falling open in shock. Will's blush trailed down his chest, and Hannibal traced it with his fingertips. "Do you really," he said, voice flat.

"I want to gorge myself on you," Will went on, even though his heart was pounding so hard against his ribs it felt like they'd crack. "I want my mouth on you, my fingers and my cock in you. I want to be so deep inside of you that there's no end to either of us."

"Will," he breathed, adjusting his shorts discretely. His erection still stood proud and thick, and Will leaned forward to mouth at him through the material. "Not here," he said weakly, watching while Will sucked him till the material was wet from his mouth.

His own cock was thick and heaving in his shorts, and he had no idea how Hannibal worked him up like this. One glance. One touch. It took nothing at all, and he was aching and hard. “Would you let me?” he asked.

Hannibal grasped the side of his neck, pulling him in for a deep, plundering kiss. It only lasted a moment before he pulled away, eyes sweeping their surroundings to make sure they were still alone. “Yes,” he whispered. “All of me belongs to you. Whatever you want is what I want.”

Will grinned, leaning forward again to kiss his cheek. “Later, then.”

“Later,” Hannibal repeated, moving away from Will until there was significant space between them. It was for the best, as a few of his cousins rounded the bend down the dirt road, and they could hear them rough housing from where they laid.

“Wait,” he said softly. “Was that what I said to you last night? Or did I say something else?”

Hannibal’s mouth tightened, but he forced his lips up into a smile, regardless. “You were just… embarrassed to vomit in front of me, I think.”

“Yeah,” Will cringed, avoiding eye contact pointedly afterwards. “Sorry I…”

“It’s alright, Will,” he promised. “It happens.”

The rest of the afternoon was spent with Hannibal as well as his cousins by the lakeside. As was usual, they trailed back to the house with he and Hannibal as the sun began to drift below the tree line. The villa was bursting with activity when they got back, his parents’ friends having come for dinner as well.

He and Hannibal helped Mafalda and Anchise move some picnic tables together, creating a long dining area under the willow tree at the side of the house. White tablecloths covered the splintered wood, then citronella candles were lit at the center of each table.

He always felt badly for Mafalda when people descended on the villa like this. Without warning, she created meals that would feed twenty people as though she were a miracle worker.

He helped her in the kitchen, spearing prosciutto onto perfect cubes of fresh watermelon. There were Tuscan steaks marinating in lemon juice and olive oil, perfectly seasoned and ready for the brief grilling they would get.

“Where is my son?” he heard his mother ask from outside.

“With Mafalda,” Hannibal responded.

His mother came around the corner, exhaling a plume of smoke. “Caro, come spend time with everyone.”

“In a minute,” he promised, hands busy at the kitchen sink where he was spearing fennel sausages with assorted peppers and onion.

“Go on,” Mafalda said by his side. “Anchise will help me. You’ve done enough.”

Her hands bracketed his neck, bringing him down for a kiss on each cheek. “You’re sure?” he asked.

“Very, darling boy. Go have fun.”

He headed outside where Hannibal was talking with a few of his cousins, a bubbling drink in his hand. “What’s that?” Will asked, gesturing towards the glass, when his cousins ambled away for drinks of their own.

“Peach Bellini,” Hannibal said, licking his lips lewdly. “Fresh peaches make it incredible.”

“Let me try it,” Will pleaded, reaching for the glass as his fingers were slapped away.

“You’ve had enough to drink in the last day,” Hannibal scolded him, then leaned in as if to share a secret. “You’ve had your fair share of peaches, too.”

Will blushed hotly, leaning away to glare at him. “I’ll never hear the end of that, will I?”

“Pervert,” Hannibal laughed, nudging Will with his elbow.

“Says the guy who ate it,” Will whispered, laughter bubbling out of him in spite of himself. “Pervert.”

“I never claimed I wasn’t,” he shrugged, sipping his peach Bellini with a sigh. “It’s good, but… it’s missing something.” His eyes fell to Will’s face for a moment, then dipped down towards Will’s crotch to let him know how he meant that.

“I can make your next one,” he said lowly, flashing his eyes up at Hannibal with a smirk. “Give it that little something extra, if you’d like.”

Hannibal’s thick swallow and dilated pupils said more than any verbal response, and it was decided. Will was going to make Hannibal’s next peach Bellini, and it would have a special ingredient in it that no one else’s did.

His cock heaved in his jeans at the thought alone.

“Are you going to allow Mafalda to wash that, or…?” Hannibal asked softly, fingers brushing Billowy at his elbow.

“Maybe,” he shrugged. “Billowy is mine, now. I can do what I want with it.”

“Billowy?” Hannibal repeated, a rose-gold blush staining his cheeks. “You’ve named it.”

“I name things that I love,” Will agreed. “What will I name your bathing suit when you give it to me, I wonder?”

Hannibal snorted into his drink, swiping his upper lip with his fingers as discretely as he could. “And why do you think I am giving you my bathing suit?”

“Because I want to wear it,” he said seriously.

“And what do I get of yours?” he asked, eyebrow raised in amusement. The sun was setting behind him, a riot of magenta and orange light that made him look ethereally beautiful.

“You won’t fit in my shirts,” Will said doubtfully, taking the opportunity to slide his eyes over Hannibal’s form as if considering it. “My bathing suits are baggy. Maybe you’d fit in mine.”

“I do,” Hannibal said immediately, then blushed to his ears. Will’s mouth fell open just as Hannibal stammered, “I mean, I’m sure I would.”

“When did you wear my bathing suit, Hannibal?” Will asked lowly.

“I need a refill,” Hannibal deflected, taking a hesitant step away from Will as though his proximity was far too much in that moment. “If you wouldn’t mind?” he asked, glancing pointed down at Will’s crotch for a brief moment.

Hannibal could smell him, and in a moment, Hannibal would taste him. “Coming right up,” Will grinned, swiping Hannibal’s glass from his fingers.

He walked right past everyone, empty glass held in his hand as if it were his. He nodded at Mafalda, then his mother who kissed his cheek as he passed. After a cursory glance around, he headed upstairs with the empty glass, then barricaded himself in the bathroom.

His cock was already hard and leaking, so he gripped himself firmly while stroking himself with quick jerks of his wrist. With a clenching gut, he wished he could ask Hannibal to do the same for a drink of his own. He’d take him into his body as though he were sharing in the eucharist, ejaculate in place of blood from the one he worshipped.

He’d take what he wanted later, directly from the source. With a moan, he thought of the way Hannibal felt against his tongue. The way his spend coated his mouth; the back of his throat.

His cock pulsed in his hand, his entrance throbbing around nothing at all with each jerk of his fist. With a pang, he realized he liked finishing with Hannibal buried deep inside of him. He liked the way his body gripped down on him in his release, keeping him where he should be.

He snatched the glass from the bathroom sink and finished himself off inside of it, watching the way his come splattered against the glass, smearing it in pearly white. He shivered, gripping his cock a little harder to get the last bit out, then tucked himself away.

After washing his hands and cleaning the sweat from his face, he headed back downstairs. No one paid him any attention as he filled the glass with ice, then peach juice. He topped it off with a generous amount of Prosecco, then stirred the drink with his finger to mix it together.

It looked… different from the other one he’d had. Paler.

He found Hannibal in the backyard, talking animatedly with their neighbor. Hannibal's eyes drifted to him as he walked over, then to his drink with a knowing smirk. "Peach Bellini," he offered, handing the drink off to Hannibal while ensuring that their fingers brushed.

"Is there another one of those?" his neighbor asked.

"Mafalda is making them," Will said dismissively. "I'm sure she would make you one."

He wandered off, and Will watched as Hannibal took a deep sip of his drink, licking his lips exaggeratedly. "Perfect," he sighed.

"Is it?" Will asked softly.

"I wonder if I'll ever be able to have a peach again without… this," he said lowly. "Thank you for taking the time to do this for me."

"I wish you could do the same for me," Will replied just as lowly.

Hannibal's eyes darkened, a gentle smile lifting the corners of his mouth. "Later," he promised.

Hannibal sat by his side through dinner, their feet touching beneath the tablecloth throughout the duration of it. "Nice shirt," Paulo teased, drinking his fourth glass of rosatello. "Do you own any other one?"

"Nope," Will replied nonchalantly, watching as Chiara's eyes darkened from across the table. She knew whose shirt he was wearing. She'd given it to Hannibal that night they all went dancing.

"Maybe after dinner we could go dancing?" Chiara asked, watching Hannibal closely.

"I think not," Hannibal responded, finishing his peach Bellini with a final deep gulp. Will watched the way his throat constricted as he swallowed, and he felt his cock jerk to life in his bathing suit. "I have an early morning tomorrow, I'm afraid."

"Nonsense!" his dad chuckled. "Go out and enjoy Italy while you're here, Hannibal."

"I had a late-night last night," Hannibal deflected, glancing over at Will with a mock-frown. "Someone spent the night in the bathroom, and I had to make sure he was alright."

"Too young for drinking," Chiara sighed, raising her glass of rosatello as if taunting Will with it. "Children always want to grow up too fast."

Will bristled, but his dad chimed in. "Will knows better," he interjected. "It won't happen again, will it?"

"No," he said, completely embarrassed by the chastisement he was getting at the dinner table.

A firm hand gripped the nape of his neck, the familiar zing of his touch grounding him while fingers ruffled through sweat-damp curls. "It happens to the best of us," Hannibal said

soothingly. “I’ve had a few nights like that here myself. That rosatello is sneaky.”

His father laughed. “It certainly is,” he agreed while lighting his after-dinner cigarette with a flourish.

Even despite Hannibal coming to his rescue, he felt like a child. He wished he could go back in time and take it back, never touch a single glass of wine while out dancing the night before. If only he were older, he thought bitterly. If only he were a man that Hannibal could feel pride in knowing.

There was no pride to be found in sharing a secret relationship with a boy who drank until he puked.

His mood darkened with his thoughts, and he retreated in on himself the way he usually did when he got like this. Life continued around him, but Hannibal’s hand searched out his thigh under the table. He gave Will’s leg a firm, brief, squeeze.

Their eyes met for the barest of seconds, and Will’s mood lightened. He didn’t look ashamed.

He looked… warm. Affectionate.

Will gave him a small smile, turning back to his meal with a bit more gusto than before.

Hannibal made the announcement that he was going to bed way before Will did. Chiara pouted as he withdrew from the table, and he watched as he went straight for Mafalda, pressing a kiss to her cheek in thanks for another wonderful dinner.

Of everyone here, Mafalda was the one that Will was certain would never grow to like Hannibal. He was an American, and he was so very unlike everyone else that he tended to stick out like a sore thumb. He had been wrong, of course.

Mafalda blushed, reaching up to touch the sharp curve of his cheekbone affectionately. She patted his cheek, smiling wide while looking up at him. “Anytime, *Tesoro*,” she smiled. “Anytime.”

Mafalda exaggeratedly fanned her face as he walked away, and the people at the table laughed at her vivid blush. “*Uomo bellissimo*,” she laughed.

Will smiled, knowing full-well what it was like when Hannibal focused that laser-like affection on you. Beautiful man, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Shorterish chapter this time, but ONLY because the next one is a smut fest and it's longggg.

Thank you guys for reading and giving kudos. I know this story isn't everyone's cup of tea, but man am I enjoying writing it. <3333

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will waited for guests to begin clearing out before announcing that he too was going to bed. Chiara watched him with a grimace, smoking her cigarette with relish. He ignored her and kissed Mafalda as well. “Sorry I didn’t help you with dinner more,” he offered.

She cupped his face in his hands, pressing a kiss to each of his cheeks. “*Caro*, you do more than enough. Off to bed with you, now.”

He laughed, dodging her swatting hands as he headed into the house.

Hannibal’s bedroom was utterly silent while he stood at the bathroom sink, brushing his teeth. He washed his face, then debated over what to do while fidgeting nervously.

His thoughts randomly turned to a French romance novel he’d read while Hannibal was ignoring him those three days. A handsome young knight fell madly in love with a princess. She was in love with him, too, though she didn’t seem aware of it. Despite the friendship that bloomed between them, or perhaps because of that friendship, he found himself humbled and speechless owing to her forbidding candor that he was totally unable to bring up the subject of his love.

One day, he asked her point-blank: ‘Is it better to speak or die?’

Will himself had never had the courage to ask such a question of himself. He found himself asking it, now.

It was better to speak. Speak, so that the truth of it was out. Speak, so that should you die, you’d at least find a modicum of peace.

He stripped off his clothes in the bathroom, walking into Hannibal’s room completely bared.

Hannibal was laying on his back, eyes turned towards the windows in thought. They drifted over to Will as he entered the darkened room, his eyes widening slightly as they drifted over Will’s body in the moonlight. One arm was behind his head, his bare chest exposed, nipples dark on his pale chest. The white sheet wrapped around his waist, and Will could see the outline of his legs in the clinging fabric. The jut of his cock where it lifted the sheets, lifting further and further as they stared at one another.

“I wasn’t sure you’d be awake,” Will said softly.

“I was waiting for you,” Hannibal admitted in a hushed breath. “I think I’ve fallen asleep, though. There’s no way this is not a dream.”

“Do you dream of me?” Will asked softly, moving towards the bed with purposeful steps. He touched the soft sheet with his fingers, pulling it back to expose the length of Hannibal’s bare body to his eyes. Without another word, he laid across Hannibal’s body, spreading himself across it so as much of their skin could touch as possible.

He braced his arms to either side of Hannibal’s head, their faces millimeters apart. Gentle fingers traced up his spine while their cocks nestled together between them. Neither moved to incite pleasure. They simply existed, skin to skin. “I dream of you almost every night,” Hannibal admitted in a breath. “On the rare nights where you evade my dreams, I awaken in a terrible mood.”

Will laughed softly, tipping his face forward to press his lips against Hannibal’s chin. “What am I doing in your dreams?” he asked, trailing kisses down Hannibal’s throat.

“Sometimes, you’re playing the piano. It’s never a piece that I know,” he sighed, tilting his head back to give Will more room to kiss his throat. “Sometimes, you’re by the pool. It’s as if the sun only shines on you alone. I want desperately to speak with you, but in those dreams, I cannot ever find the courage to speak.”

Will paused, glancing up at Hannibal in shock. It was as if they lived in one another’s minds, knowing one another fully without having to speak at all. “Is it better to speak or die?” Will asked.

“Simple,” Hannibal replied, fingers dipping lower to trace over his bottom. “Speak, or else you’ll die a little bit every time you wonder, ‘what if?’”

“Do you think a person can survive without their soul?” Will asked, stroking his own fingers against Hannibal’s bare chest.

He traced his finger over Hannibal’s throat as he swallowed, feeling his Adam’s apple bob against his fingertips. “I am not your soul, Will,” he said softly.

“You’re my blood and breath,” Will countered, tears welling in his eyes. “You’re more than the other half of me. I’m…”

“Me,” Hannibal finished. “And I am you.”

“Yes,” Will said thickly, sweeping his fingers through the tear tracks on Hannibal’s cheeks. “How does one go on without themselves?”

“You’re going to go off to college,” Hannibal said softly, eyes fixed on Will’s own. “You’re going to find something you love. Then someone you love. You’re going to look back at this summer fondly, but… you’ll still breathe. You’ll still flourish. You’re so *young*, beloved. Trust me when I tell you that… in time, the pain of losing someone lessens.”

Pain lanced through Will’s heart. Had Hannibal loved another like he loved Will? Did he get over them as he knew he’d get over Will, too? Was everyone in the world utterly replaceable with someone else? “You’ve loved someone else.”

“My sister,” Hannibal admitted in a husky whimper. “She died when… when the men broke into our home in Lithuania. They killed my parents and kept us locked away while they decided what to do with us. She… she died. She got sick, and she died. She was only four, and I loved her so very much.”

Will’s heart shattered in his chest, and he hugged Hannibal close. “I am so sorry, Hannibal. I’m sorry.”

“It isn’t your fault,” he said thickly. “Believe me when I tell you that if I can move on from her loss, you will move on from me, too.”

“Why do I have to?” Will asked, pulling away so he could look down at him again. “Why do I have to move on from you? You’re right here. You’re *alive*. I am alive. This isn’t some stupid romance novel where we should part feeling as though we’ve bettered one another. I want you in my life, Hannibal.”

“Now,” he said softly. “You feel that way now. How will you feel in ten years when you realize that you’ve never experienced anyone other than me? How will you cope with the sense of loss that you feel at knowing that your youth was spent tied down to a single person? I can’t be with you while you’re away in college. The next four or five years at least will be spent utterly apart. You’ll meet people that capture your interest, and I won’t stand in the way of that. You deserve to experience all that life has to offer you.”

“Life has offered me you,” he said desperately. “Some people wait their entire lives for something like this to come to them. How lucky am I that I found you at seventeen?”

“Life has a way of bringing people together,” he acknowledged. “It also has a way of tearing them apart. I will stay in your life, Will. If you want me to. I will be your friend, always. I will be there for you whenever you need me. No matter what happens. No matter where our lives take us. Isn’t that enough?”

It wasn’t. Will’s breath left him in a sob, and he tucked his face against Hannibal’s heart. Gentle fingers carded through his hair, then strong arms wrapped him tight. Hannibal turned their bodies so that Will was cradled against him, holding him through the embarrassing burst of agony that was tearing him apart from the inside, out.

“Promise me,” Will said eventually, voice thick with unshed tears.

“I promise you,” he said vehemently, holding his head against his chest. The steady thump of his heart echoed against Will’s ear, and he savored it. *This is what his heart sounds like*, he thought. Another thing filed away in his Mind Palace that was constructed for Hannibal alone.

Soft fingers were weaving through his hair, almost provoking him into falling asleep. Will didn’t want it. They had a handful of days left together, and even fewer nights where they could be themselves in the cover of moonlight.

He sat up abruptly and kissed Hannibal, licking into his mouth fiercely while grasping the sides of his face to keep him there. Hannibal felt hesitant, his head tilting away as best as he

could despite Will's desperation.

Will wiggled over, tossing a leg over his hips so he could straddle him, and Hannibal pressed him back with the flat of his palms against his chest. "Will, what are you doing?"

"Please," he pleaded, shaking his head while tears coursed down his cheeks. "Please."

"Not like this," Hannibal said softly, holding Will's hips still in his big hands to prevent him from grinding down against him. His cock was thickening again, resting just under Will's balls and inciting fire in his blood. "Let's just… spend time? Yeah?"

"I don't want to look back on this and think that I ruined an entire evening because I cried," Will said vehemently. "We don't have *time*, Hannibal. I want you. Please?"

Hannibal stared up at him as if debating something, plush upper lip disappearing behind slightly less than perfect teeth. "Make love to me, then," he said softly. "If you want to."

"If I want to," Will repeated with a mocking laugh, leaning forward to capture those perfect lips in another kiss. "I don't know what I'm doing."

"Neither did I," Hannibal countered. "We figure it out. Together."

"Together," Will agreed, lacing his fingers through Hannibal's hair to tilt his face up. The kiss was less vicious than the others that Will had given him, and Hannibal relaxed while their tongues met and retreated, savoring one another.

Will took his time. There was so much of Hannibal to explore, and he wanted to be able to recall everything about him right down to the smallest of details. He kissed and licked at his throat, then his collarbones. He gripped Hannibal's chest in his palms and squeezed, always somewhat amazed that there was so much firm flesh to grab in the first place.

His chest heaved in Will's hands, and he leaned forward to suck his nipples, delighting in the feel of roughened chest hair against his lips. He bit down on the puckered flesh, eyes lifting at the sound of a harsh hiss that broke free from Hannibal's mouth.

His eyes were dark while watching Will latch onto him, their eyes holding as Will sucked his nipple with vigor. "Will," he gasped, back arching away from the bed to press himself further into Will's eager mouth.

After releasing the swollen nub from between his teeth, he trailed his mouth downwards, licking and sucking against the hard muscles of his abdomen. The skin over his ribs was soft as silk and tasted of masculine sweat and salt. There wasn't an inch of him that Will found repellant. He wanted all of it.

"Roll over," he pleaded, voice roughened in his mounting desire.

Hannibal smiled, rolling himself over between Will's spread thighs. He shifted down over the firm plane of his body, groaning low as his cock nestled perfectly in the crease of his tight ass. Will trailed his fingers over his back, following the indentations of sculpted muscle

greedily, then retraced the same path with his tongue. “You’re so beautiful,” Will said lowly, leaning forward to press a kiss against Hannibal’s temple.

Hannibal’s eyes fluttered shut when his lips met his skin, a soft smile curving the corner of his mouth. “As are you,” he said softly.

“I want to mark you,” he gasped, thrusting his cock between Hannibal’s cheeks almost desperately. “I want you to be marked by me.”

“Do as you please,” Hannibal shivered, hips tilting up as though begging for Will to penetrate him.

Will shifted back, slapping Hannibal’s thigh to get him up on his knees. He did so without pause. Without self-consciousness. The firm mound of his bottom arched into the air, and Will had to bite back a sob at how gorgeous the view was. He kissed the small of his back, gripping the flesh of his ass that had haunted his dreams since he’d first met Hannibal. Since he’d first seen him in his tiny, little, red, bathing suit.

A crazy thought occurred to him, and he spread his cheeks with his thumbs, marveling over the way the firm flesh parted for his fingers. The tiny pucker of his entrance was in plain view, now, and Will grinned while licking it with the flat of his tongue.

“Fuck,” Hannibal gasped, hips snapping as though he’d been electrocuted. “Will. God, Will,” he sobbed.

Will leaned back in, using his tongue to breach him as gently as he could. Hannibal’s hips rocked against his face, his knees spreading wider in invitation.

He licked and sucked at him until his jaw ached. Until his tongue felt tired and heavy from pressing into such a tight little hole. It opened for him slowly, and eventually, Will was able to seal his mouth over him and kiss it much like he kissed Hannibal’s mouth.

Deeply. Tongue exploring inside a place where no one had ever been before. *This is what he tastes like*, Will thought feverishly, filing away the slightly musky flavor of him where he could recall it when he wanted to.

His own cock was so hard and aching it felt like it had a pulse. He needed to come, or else when he finally sank inside of Hannibal for the first time it would be over before it began. He pulled away from Hannibal, going up on his own knees to press his cock right against the slightly opened entrance of him, jerking his cock frantically while pressing the head right where it would be in a few moments.

He moaned as his cock jerked and pulsed in his hand, spilling against the seam of his ass as well as the tight furl of his entrance. Hannibal shivered under him, his fingers gripping the pillow hard on either side of his head.

His orgasm felt like lightning arcing across his entire body, and Will shivered too as he came back down from it. He pulled away a bit, tracing his fingers through his come that was dripping down Hannibal’s spread cheeks, dripping lower over the tight sac hanging between

his thighs. He pressed his fingers through it, collecting it up on his fingers before pressing a finger directly inside of Hannibal's body.

"Christ," Hannibal moaned, and Will watched his thick cock dribble against the mattress between his legs.

His finger sank inside easily enough, and Will marveled over the tightness of it. The way the muscle pulsed and constricted around him. He worked more of his come inside, pressing another finger in once Hannibal had opened enough to take it.

With two fingers, he tried to find that spot inside that made him see stars. The squelch of his fingers was lewd as he worked them in and out, scooping more of his come to press it inside occasionally.

It took a few moments, but eventually he found it. A tiny little numb buried inside of Hannibal's body. He pressed against it gently, circling the pads of his fingers over it in a small circle, and Hannibal whined.

"Please," he begged, his entire body quivering. "Oh, God, please."

"I've got you," Will promised, pressing another finger in just to stretch him a bit further. "I want to see your face," he said lowly.

Hannibal rolled over again, his chest and face covered in a sheen of sweat while he parted his thighs, resting them around Will's waist. Will reached for the lube on the nightstand, working some over his cock that was once again so hard it was painful.

He pressed the wet head of it against Hannibal's entrance, and then he was sinking in.

Each moaned as he bottomed out, their mouths meeting in a clumsy kiss that felt as desperate as they were each feeling. Hannibal's big hands were cupping his jaw and neck, holding him close as Will pumped his hips experimentally.

It was so tight it felt painful. It felt perfect. It was everything he'd never known he wanted. The tight little muscle clamped around him like a fist, pulsing and constricting as though trying to take him deeper. "God," he gasped, thrusting a bit more vigorously. *This is what he feels like*, Will thought, and no one else would ever compare. He knew it, just as he knew he'd never even try.

He grasped Hannibal's long legs, folding them up towards his chest to change the angle. He knew this felt better because it felt better when Hannibal did it to him. The moment he thrust forward, Hannibal sobbed. "There," he moaned, head tilting back in ecstasy. "Will, right there."

Will picked up his pace, nailing that spot inside of him the best he could while Hannibal writhed under him. Their stomachs were slick with sweat, Hannibal's thick cock wedged between the trap of their humid flesh. He could feel it drooling between them, coating their skin in sticky slick.

Hannibal came not a moment after he began fucking him in this position. His body constricted around Will's cock, pulsing and fluttering with each wave of his cresting orgasm. He kept up the same vigorous pace, working himself to completion while sucking Hannibal's lips between his own.

"Will," Will breathed into his ear, stirring his damp hair with his breath. "Will, Will," he chanted.

Hannibal moaned, arching his back as his cock twitched between them with every thrust of Will's hips. "Hannibal," he said, voice utterly ruined. "Hannibal," he repeated.

They kissed almost sweetly while Will pounded his desire into him. Everything felt wet and hot between them, the scent of sex and sweat almost thick in the humid night air of their bedroom. Will's orgasm was torn from him, and he smashed their mouths together as he buried himself deep, filling Hannibal to the brim.

His whole body was lit up with pleasure, every nerve ending in him firing and making him quiver. He shivered, licking the sweat from Hannibal's throat with the flat of his tongue.

Hannibal's cock was thick and wet between them again, and Will pulled himself from his body carefully, trailing kisses down his come-slickened torso. He took him in his mouth, his cock thick and heavy on his tongue.

Gentle fingers carded through his sweat-damp hair while he worked Hannibal's cock with his hands and mouth until he came deep in Will's throat.

The night drifted, each taking turns bringing one another pleasure. Will felt grateful that his body could respond the way it did, as he couldn't get enough of the man next to him. He bit a bruise against Hannibal's ass, sucking the firm flesh until Hannibal hissed in pain before he drifted his mouth over to where he was still spilling out from his stretched and reddened hole.

He kissed the arch of each of Hannibal's feet, behind his knees, the strong muscle in his thighs. He sucked another bruise on the juncture between his hip and leg, in a place that would easily be covered by a bathing suit.

Hannibal spread his cheeks, licking into him with vigor until Will came across the bed sheets with a gasp, his body so wet with sweat it felt like he'd gone swimming. It took a while for Hannibal to be ready for him again, but by the time he was, Will was stretched open enough that Hannibal slid in, pressing deep with a firm roll of his hips.

Will pressed him away with his palms against his sweaty chest, rolling Hannibal onto his back. He looked put out for half a second until Will straddled his thighs, taking him back inside his body. "Deep," he moaned, rolling his hips, shifting the heavy girth of him inside his body. "Hannibal," he gasped.

"Will," he said reverently, large hands cupping Will's hipbones to urge him on. It felt like he was buried so deep that he was in Will's stomach, though he knew that wasn't possible. He took his time, grinding on Hannibal lazily while fisting his wet cock, delighting in the ravenous expression on Hannibal's face.

He came with a gasp, spilling his seed across Hannibal's sculpted chest.

Time drifted, each lost to the feel of the other's skin. The scent of sex and sweat under their noses. The way they tasted on one another's tongues.

The sun crested over the horizon, casting the room in hazy pink light that made Hannibal's skin look like rose gold. Hannibal laughed in surprise, glancing out toward the windows with his sweaty hair standing on end and his lips raspberry red from biting kisses. "Never done this before," he admitted in surprise.

"Guess what," Will laughed, arching from the bed while Hannibal stroked his cock lazily.

Amber eyes shifted back to him, amusement plain on his face. "What?"

"Neither have I," he laughed.

Hannibal laughed, spreading himself over Will like a muscled blanket. Their lips were sore, so their kisses were very, very, gentle. Will came again, and Hannibal chuckled while dipping down his body to lap his mess clean with the flat of his tongue. "This room reeks," Hannibal said with a sigh, flopping bonelessly against the mattress to Will's side.

"The mattress is wet," Will agreed with a laugh.

Hannibal's eyes widened, and he sat up abruptly to stare down at the come streaked sheets. "Fuck," he breathed. "Mafalda will know, Will. When she changes the sheets, she'll know."

Will sat up just as quickly, turning to take in the streaks of come and sweat that had soaked in. "Fuck," he agreed, thinking hard while scratching his beard-burned chest. "I know," he said quickly. "Wait right here. Just wait," he said, yanking Hannibal's shorts on by the side of the bed.

He crept out from the room as quietly as he could. Mafalda woke early, but she wouldn't be awake just yet.

He went to the kitchen to pour a glass of rosatello into a cup. It was deep reddish pink, and it would have to do. He brought the glass back to the bedroom, closing the door as quietly as he could. "Little early for a drink, don't you think?" Hannibal laughed.

"Get up," he giggled, hoisting his gloriously naked body up from the bed. Will threw the glass of wine on the sheets, and Hannibal made a noise in his throat.

"Have you gone mad?" he laughed.

"You were drinking in bed last night," Will said sternly, watching the red seep into their come stains slowly. "You spilled your wine. You feel really bad about it, don't you?"

"She was *just* starting to like me, too," Hannibal sighed. "Help me strip the bed, then."

They changed the sheets, crumpling the dirty ones into a ball. "I'll start a load of wash when I go downstairs," he chuckled. "And apologize profusely."

“I have to go shower,” Will said, biting his lip nervously. “I wish you could join me.”

“Still not tired of me?” Hannibal asked, tugging Will against his naked chest to press another gentle kiss to his cheek.

“Never,” Will said, tipping his head back as gentle kisses peppered down his throat. “You’re going to be tired today, though.”

“I’ll nap in *heaven*,” he shrugged.

Will blinked up at him with a frown. “Heaven?”

“The trough,” Hannibal laughed, blushing gently. “I think of it as *heaven*. It’s so beautiful there under the willow trees, the sun streaking through the leaves. It smells of lavender from the fields behind it. I wish I could spend all day, every day, there.”

“Pretty big change of heart you’ve had,” Will mused. “You went from thinking you’d get Legionella there to calling it *heaven*.”

“My heart has been utterly changed,” he agreed, kissing Will’s neck one more time. “Go shower. I’ll meet you downstairs in a bit.”

After showering, Will went to his own room to climb onto the bed, mussing the sheets with his damp skin. His entire body ached and throbbed. His cock felt sore and chafed. The skin between his cheeks felt raw from Hannibal’s stubbled face, and he grinned while closing his eyes for a moment.

He heard the shower kick on in the bathroom, and he let his mind drift to what Hannibal looked like while naked and wet.

It was a shock for him to realize his cock couldn’t even twitch in interest. He was completely wrung out.

If he laid here any longer, he knew he’d fall asleep. With a sigh, he stood from the bed and moved to gather some clothes. He got dressed and messed up his bed a bit more before heading downstairs.

Mafalda was in the kitchen making breakfast, so he stopped there to help her cut hot Italian bread and fresh fruits for the breakfast table.

Hannibal came downstairs shortly after him, stopping off at the laundry room to start a load of wash before heading into the kitchen, too. “I spilled a glass of wine on my bed last night,” he said sorrowfully.

Mafalda’s hands stopped working, and she looked at him with mild upset. “*Vino Rosso*?”

“Unfortunately,” he grimaced.

“Leave them by the laundry room,” she said with a sigh.

“I’ve already begun washing them,” he said shyly, moving to snatch a piece of watermelon from Will’s cutting board.

“You… started a load of laundry?” she asked in disbelief. No one did that in this house.

“Yes,” he said carefully. “I’ll move them to the line, too. If the stain won’t come out, I’ll buy new sheets. Promise.”

She set her knife down on the table and went to press two thankful kisses to each of his cheeks. “A blessing,” she laughed. “He does laundry.”

Will laughed, biting his lip while Hannibal blushed to his hairline. “Need help in the kitchen?” he wondered.

“Go,” she laughed, shooing him from the room. “Go *away*, perfect man.”

Breakfast was a little awkward. His parents seemed quiet, watching he and Hannibal almost knowingly. “You have a rash,” his mother said, touching the stubble-burn on his throat.

“Too much sun yesterday,” he shrugged.

“Wear sunscreen today,” she said, lighting her first cigarette of the day.

A soft foot covered his under the table, and he nodded while returning to his breakfast.

Hannibal went off to help his dad afterwards, and Will went up to change into his bathing suit to head down to… *heaven*. He laughed to himself, shaking his head while fluffing his blue bathing suit out. A stray thought occurred to him, and he bit his lip while going into Hannibal’s room. He snatched the red bathing suit from where it had dried on the back of his desk chair, replacing it with his own bathing suit instead.

With a feeling of rebellion in his gut, he tugged Hannibal’s bathing suit on and headed down to the pool to wait for Hannibal to join him.

Chapter End Notes

Pretty much entirely porn. Jesus. I should feel bad? But I don't? Meh.

Love you guys.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He had been reading his book about Robert Ressler, but he must have dozed off by the side of the pool. The sun hadn't quite crested over the trees yet, and the entire pool area was cast in deep shade, a cool breeze coming from the lavender fields beyond their property.

"This isn't discreet," a deep voice said by his side.

He startled awake, swiping drool from his chin while blinking up at Hannibal's pursed lips. "What?"

"This," he said, tugging at Will's blue bathing suit that was now clad around his narrow waist. Will felt his cock twitch. His cock, that was resting inside of Hannibal's bathing suit. "This is not *discreet*. Your parents were quiet this morning, and… your father kept asking me about you in the study. If we were getting along, if I… *liked* you."

"Everyone wears everyone else's bathing suits around here," Will shrugged, flopping back against the lawn chair. "This isn't a clue about us, Hannibal."

"Combined with everything else, it certainly is," he grimaced. "I respect your father. I adore your parents. They've been kinder to me in this last month than my own family has been in my entire life. I don't want them to… hate me, Will. I don't want them to regret ever having me in their home."

"You're upset about a bathing suit?" Will asked in disbelief. "If it bothered you, you could have worn your yellow one. Or your beige one. No one put a gun to your head about wearing mine."

Hannibal flushed, scratching the toned flat of his belly with his fingers. "I wanted to," he admitted softly. "I *hate* that I wanted to because it puts us… it draws attention to us. You already wear Billowy everywhere you go. They… suspect, Will. I know they do."

"Even if they *did*, it doesn't matter," Will argued. "Age of consent is 14, here. If you want to be technical and say you have some kind of influence over me, like a teacher, then the age of consent rises to 16. Are you aware that prostitution is legal here so long as the prostitute in question is under the age of 18?"

Hannibal groaned, sitting gingerly on the side of the trough. He sat as though his bottom was aching, and Will bit back a smile. "I don't agree with it," he said eventually. "It's too young."

"Well get over it," Will said bitterly. "This isn't America, Hannibal. The vineyard down the road, you've pedaled by it every time you head into town. Silvestri's Vineyards? It's run entirely by a seventeen-year-old, and has been run by him for over a year. His father died when he was a kid, and his mother passed away from leukemia last spring. He takes care of

his three siblings and runs that vineyard by himself. You think if he wanted to fuck someone, he should wait another year?"

"That's not the same," Hannibal replied. "In America, there are also kids who were forced to grow up too quickly. Even that isn't okay."

Will shook his head. "You just don't get it. My mother married my dad at seventeen. He is six years older than her. Is that disgusting to you?"

"Not disgusting," he said carefully, dangling one foot into the water. "But let's not pretend that she doesn't resent him for it. I'll have been here a month tomorrow, and I've never seen them exchange a kiss or a hug. I very rarely even see them touch one another at all."

Will bristled at that, realizing how very, very, true it was, even though he didn't want to hear it. "You think that would be us," he realized suddenly.

Hannibal turned his torso away, feet dangling into the water for a moment before he dropped himself into the pool. Will put his book aside, moving to sit on the edge of the trough as well. Hannibal was carefully avoiding eye contact, and it angered him. "You think I would resent you, like my mother resents my father. It's not the same. They married because their families wanted them to. They married for comfort. Any affection they were able to achieve was tentative at best, and it was very early on in their relationship. Most Europeans have two or three kids at least, but… they only had me. I know it was probably a struggle to even achieve that much for them."

"We could never be married, Will," Hannibal said softly. "It's not why. I've told you why, and I don't want to do this again. Can we just… enjoy the afternoon? Please?"

Will crossed his arms defensively but nodded his head. "Yeah. Sure."

"I don't want to anger you further," he sighed, dipping low to wet his corded shoulders. "But I think we should sleep separately tonight. Just in case… someone decides to stop in and check."

"*Rompicoglioni*," Will muttered, making Hannibal laugh. "Fine. Yeah. You sleep alone, then."

"I don't want to," Hannibal said softly, wading over to where Will's feet kicked lazily under the water. His foot was lifted, and kisses were trailed against the arch of his foot, then his ankle. Will laughed, kicking water at him with his other foot. "*Moccioso*," Hannibal laughed, reaching up to grip Will's waist, hauling him into the pool as though Will weighed nothing more than a feather.

Will sputtered, coming to his feet to glare daggers at Hannibal while he chuckled. "Brat?" Will asked indignantly. "*You're* a damned brat!" He jumped at Hannibal, latching onto his back while splashing him frantically. His legs wrapped around his waist, each giggling madly.

"Truce!" Hannibal bellowed through a laugh. "Truce!"

“Brats don’t engage in ceasefires,” Will yelled, all while laughing like a loon. Hannibal grasped his wrists in his hands, hoisting him around while Will struggled to free himself. Just like that, Hannibal dipped him under the water, making Will sputter as he was lifted back out. “Stop that!”

He did it again, and Will filled his mouth with water while he was under, spitting it in Hannibal’s face as he was dragged back up again. Hannibal laughed, turning his face away while covering Will’s mouth with his hand. Will bit at his fingers playfully, and Hannibal yelped. “Worse than a child!” Hannibal complained.

“Is it safe to join?” a voice said bitterly from the side of the pool.

They inched away from one another, each sweeping water from their faces. Chiara stared down at them in a bikini that barely covered her tits, mouth pursed in a tight line. “Please,” Hannibal said politely, breath coming quick with their playfight. “Will was just…”

“Kicking his ass,” he laughed, splashing him again.

“Being a brat,” Hannibal finished.

She climbed in daintily, tugging her bathing suit top off completely. Will blanched at her boldness, avoiding looking at her naked chest at all costs. Hannibal seemed stunned, too, and he blinked while looking away. “So shy,” she giggled. “Americans don’t go topless, I understand.”

“Not in front of a teenaged boy,” Hannibal said cynically.

Will bristled at that, but Chiara laughed. “Something tells me Will has seen more than naked breasts as of late,” she shrugged. “I was going to ask if you’d like to join me for a drink tonight, but I think it would be… how does the saying go? Barking up the wrong tree.”

Hannibal licked his lips, moving to the edge of the pool to climb out. He stalked away without even grabbing his towel, and Will scowled at her for ruining their afternoon. “What is wrong with you?”

Her eyes flashed at him as she stood boldly, almost daring Will to look at her body, which he did not. “I came by to see him,” she said, climbing from the pool to tug her top back on. “I think I won’t bother with that, anymore. His tastes clearly tend towards… those that are underdeveloped. It’s strange to me, because if he is with you because you’re pretty, there are much, much, prettier girls out there.”

“Like you?” Will asked bitterly.

She laughed, wringing her dark hair over her shoulder. “Like me,” she agreed.

“Go home, Chiara,” Will said lowly. “Go the fuck away.”

Her eyes flashed at him again, and she snatched her towel before stalking off in the same direction that Hannibal had gone.

Will glanced down at himself with a frown, touching his scrawny chest with his fingertips. Hannibal wasn't with him because he was as pretty as a girl. He was with him because Will was a man. Will fucked him with his cock for hours the night before and Hannibal came untouched twice. For the first time in his life, the cruel words washed right over him, barely touching him at all.

Hannibal wanted him because he was Will. Because of everything about him, right down to his calloused feet.

With that, he climbed from the pool, too. He snatched his towel as well as Hannibal's, then headed into the house.

Hannibal was in the kitchen cutting up a few slices of watermelon, and Will sidled up to him to snatch a few cubes to pop them into his mouth. Mafalda was in the orchard with her husband and Anchise, and his parents were likely in the study. He leaned forward to press a quick, chaste, kiss to Hannibal's cheek, and Hannibal immediately recoiled. "Will, not... not here."

"There's no one around," he laughed.

"Still," he said, eyes focused solely on cutting up his watermelon as though he had to concentrate.

Will popped another cube into his mouth, considering something. "Let's pack a lunch and go fishing?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how to fish," Hannibal chuckled. "I'll join you, though."

They packed a few chunks of Italian bread, cheese, and cold cuts, as well as a glass bottle of apricot juice and water. While Hannibal tucked everything into a basket, Will went out to the shed to grab his fishing pole and gear, stowing everything away in his red wagon to drag it back to the house.

Hannibal packed a canvas bag with beach towels, sunscreen, and a leather book that Will had never seen before, as well as two tee shirts, then they headed down to the stream.

The stream was behind the lavender fields, down a dirt road that connected the lake by his house to another one a few miles south of it. The water at its deepest was just about waist deep, and trout as well as catfish used the stream to get from one lake to the other. He'd always had success fishing here, even though Anchise preferred fishing in a rowboat in the deeper waters of the lake.

"Who taught you to fish?" Hannibal asked, lacing their fingers together while pulling the red wagon full of their things behind them. It bounced and banged behind them, tires digging into each divot in the dirt road.

“Anchise,” Will admitted. “People think he’s creepy because he doesn’t talk much, but… he just doesn’t have much to say. He loves taking care of this property, and he loves being outside. He doesn’t know books or movies or things like that. He dropped out of school when he was eight to help his parents with their farm, so I’m not sure he can even read, really. But he knows gardening. He knows fishing. He understands nothing so much as the earth, and what it takes to grow something perfectly.”

“I adore him,” Hannibal shrugged. “He’s never been anything but kind to me. Granted, we’ve never spoken about anything other than gardening.”

“*Have* you spoken to him about gardening?” Will laughed while rubbing his thumb against Hannibal’s inner wrist.

“His tomatoes,” Hannibal sighed. “We don’t have anything like them in America. I asked for a few seeds as well as his tending methods because I need tomatoes like that back home. I also love his herb garden. I’ve never seen anything quite like that before.”

Will liked the idea of that. Hannibal, growing plants that he’d brought with him from here. Eating fruit from Italy, keeping them tethered together in some way. “Maybe he’ll give you some clippings from his herb garden, too. You could grow the things you like best from here back at home.”

“I’ll ask him,” Hannibal smiled. “How long has he been working for your parents?”

“At least twenty years,” Will said, earning a shocked expression from Hannibal. “The farm where he worked went under about… I don’t know, thirty years ago, I guess. He came here part-time, and he lived in the smallest shack by the river my dad had ever seen in his life. My dad asked him one day if he’d like to live on the property and take care of the orchard in exchange for a small salary as well as free room and board. He’s been here ever since.”

“It’s such a different way of life, here,” Hannibal sighed, glancing up at the thick canopy of trees over their heads. Sunlight slanted through the leaves, making his eyes look like they were lit from within. “I could get used to it.”

“Ask my parents,” Will laughed. “Maybe they’d take you on as an apprentice for Anchise. He’s getting older, and he can’t do everything he used to do anymore.”

“What will happen to him once he can no longer work?” Hannibal asked softly.

“He’ll stay here,” Will replied obviously. “It’s his home.”

They got to the small clearing by his stream, each unpacking their things along the shady grass hill by the side of it. Hannibal blinked out over the water, taking in their surroundings with wide eyes. “This is beautiful,” he said, awestruck.

“My little slice of heaven,” Will agreed with a laugh. “Are you observing or participating?”

“Observing,” he replied with a laugh of his own. “Go ahead. Catch us something good for dinner.”

He nodded, settling out in the grass to tie off his line with a new lure he made at the beginning of the summer. “These are lovely,” Hannibal remarked by his side, reaching out to finger a feather gently. “Where do you buy them?”

“I make them,” Will admitted, snipping the excess line with his scissors.

“Do you really?”

“Take one you like,” Will shrugged, pushing the box of them over for Hannibal’s perusal. “I make tons of them, and they don’t cost a thing to make aside from the fishing line and hooks.”

He headed down into the water, and with a deep sigh, he cast his line.

They were quiet while he fished, but they had to be if they intended for Will to catch anything. Hours drifted by with Will only climbing out from the stream to ditch a fish he’d caught in the bucket of water. Hannibal was silent, hunched over his leather book with what looked like a charcoal clutched in his fingers. “What are you doing?” Will asked.

“Sketching,” Hannibal shrugged.

“May I?” he wondered, gesturing towards the book with an outstretched hand.

“Not with your fishy little fingers,” Hannibal laughed, glancing up at him with affection. “Come sit. I’ll show you.”

Will sat by his side, their arms pressed tight while Hannibal tilted his sketchbook towards Will. The sketch that he was working on made Will’s jaw hang open. “You’re sketching me?”

“The line of your back,” Hannibal replied, then licked his lips. “The way the sunlight looked on your skin. I had to, Will. So beautiful.”

The sketch was of Will with his back turned to Hannibal, the surrounding woods and stream drawn in perfect detail. Will was clearly the focus of the sketch, and he was drawn with such loving detail that Will could hardly believe anyone would take the time to draw him this way. Everything about him, right down to his wild curls, was drawn perfectly. “This is beautiful,” Will said thickly. “Are there more?”

Hannibal nodded, then pressed a piece of parchment against the sketch he was working on before flipping the page. Will was clearly the star of the show, and it made him blush. Sketches of him sleeping by the poolside, heaven drawn in perfect detail around Will’s lax and sleeping form.

Will in the garden at the side of the house, smile wide and eyes lifted up as if he were looking at the moon. Will’s side profile while sitting to Hannibal’s side, likely at dinner or breakfast.

What did it mean that Hannibal had drawn him like this? In every sketch, Will was drawn as though the sun parted for him alone. His eyes were shining in every drawing, his hair drawn accurately right down to the curls that lifted up at the nape of his neck. The freckle he had on

his shoulder blade was present, meaning that Hannibal noticed him enough to include it. It was worthy of inclusion.

There were pages and pages of Will. His eyes. His hands while he played the piano. His body curled around his guitar. His breath left him when he realized that even that was drawn accurately; the little nick under his guitar's pick guard sketched as though it, too, mattered.

There were sketches of the villa as well as the lake, then the sketches turned into ones he'd done back in America. "Who is this?" Will asked, touching the corner of the page.

"My sister," Hannibal admitted. "Mischa. I… I can hardly recall her face, but… this is what I remember of her."

She was sweet and cherub-like, blonde hair and wide eyes. She had Hannibal's cheekbones even when she was small enough that it shouldn't be obvious, yet. "She's beautiful," Will said softly.

"She was," Hannibal agreed softly, eyes fixed on his sketch. "The winter that the men broke into our home, I tried to run with her. I tried to save her. To save us. The snow was too deep. The weather too cold. I was only six, and she was barely four. We were outside for hours, trudging through snow when they caught us to drag us back to the house. She had been outside for too long, and she was so small."

"Hannibal," Will sighed, resting his forehead against his shoulder while stroking the soft skin of his back. "You tried. You were just a kid. You did everything you could."

"It was my fault that she got so sick," Hannibal choked, folding in on himself in a protective gesture. "It was my fault."

"No," Will said vehemently, pressing another kiss against his shoulder. "It was their fault. You were doing what you thought you needed to do to survive. You were trying to save her."

Hannibal swiped angrily at his tears, then flipped his sketchbook closed. "I tried, and I failed."

"If your roles were reversed, would you want her to be angry at herself like this?" Will asked softly. "Would you want her to feel guilt like this for trying to save you?"

"No," Hannibal said immediately. "I would… I would never blame her. Never."

"Do you think she would blame you?"

"I don't…" Hannibal sighed, leaning into Will's body a bit. "She never blamed me for anything. She looked up to me for everything, Will. I know she wouldn't want me to blame myself, and she would hate that I feel so guilty. I do, though. I can't help it."

Will had the audacity to forget sometimes that Hannibal had survived something truly horrific. He'd not only survived it but lived through it. He couldn't imagine the things that Hannibal had seen. The heartbreak and sorrow that he'd gone through at such a tender young age. "Do you remember your parents?"

Hannibal shook his head, then shrugged. “Bits and pieces of them,” he admitted. “I remember my mother, mostly. She was warm and kind. I remember her reading to me before bed, mostly.”

“In Lithuanian?” Will asked.

“Italian,” Hannibal smiled. “She was Italian.”

“So… you’re half-Italian?” he asked in surprise. “No wonder you’re so perfect.”

Hannibal laughed, lifting his watery eyes up to meet Will’s own. Will leaned forward just as Hannibal did, and their kiss was soft. Sweet. Possibly the gentlest one they’d ever exchanged, and it made Will’s heart thump in his chest. This is what his tears taste like, he thought, even though it shamed him to catalogue such a thing.

Soft fingers cupped under his jaw, and Hannibal pulled away to shift his eyes over Will’s face. “Go catch us some fish. I want to cook dinner for everyone tonight.”

“You?” Will asked in surprise.

“I know how to cook, Will,” he grinned, though it was still watery.

“Mafalda is going to leave her husband and marry you instead,” Will teased, pressing one last kiss to the strong curve of his shoulder.

“My heart belongs to someone else,” Hannibal said softly, making Will pause while coming to his feet. He swallowed thickly, lifting his eyes towards Hannibal almost cautiously.

“Me?” Will asked in disbelief.

“Yes, you,” Hannibal laughed. “Who else?”

Will leaned forward to press another kiss to his mouth, his lips stretched into a smile. He pulled away after a moment, and Hannibal chased his mouth down for another kiss, which Will gave him with a vibrant giggle. “Can… Will you draw me something? A sketch I can keep?”

Hannibal nodded, pressing another kiss to Will’s cheek. “I’ll sketch you something.”

Will beamed, ruffling Hannibal’s hair before heading off to catch another fish.

His haul was impressive. Five rainbow trout squirmed in the bucket as they headed back to the house. Hannibal’s hand was encased in his own, their shoulders brushing occasionally. Will brought the bucket into the house where Mafalda was just getting ready to make dinner, and she gasped when she saw his bucket. “Mio Dio!” she exclaimed. “They’re beautiful, Caro.”

Hannibal followed Will into the house, tugging on a thin blue tee shirt over his head. “I’m cooking tonight, Mafalda,” he grinned, moving towards her to press a kiss to each of her cheeks. “Go take an afternoon off, and dinner will be ready for you in an hour or so.”

She blinked at him as though he were speaking a language she didn’t understand. “You… you are cooking?”

“How many people tonight?” Hannibal asked, washing his hands at the kitchen sink.

Her mouth was still hung open comically, and Will laughed. “*Quanti*, Mafalda?”

“*Quattro*,” she said softly, still obviously in shock while watching Hannibal become acquainted with her kitchen.

“*Sette*,” Hannibal replied. “You and your husband as well as Anchise are dining with us tonight.”

She stood there gawking while Will began cleaning their fish on the cutting board designated for that purpose. Hannibal breezed around him, gathering ingredients as well as cooking tools that he’d need. “I can… help?” she wondered breathlessly.

“Will is going to help me,” Hannibal said with a smile. “Aren’t you, Will?”

“*Sì*,” Will agreed with a laugh, hands filthy with fish scales and guts.

Mafalda moved around the island, kissing Hannibal’s cheek, then Will’s cheek. “*Uomini perfetti*,” she breathed. “*Grazie*!”

“*Non è niente*,” Hannibal replied with a laugh. “It’s nothing at all.”

She backed out of the kitchen as though she didn’t believe the situation, moving into the garden slowly. “No one does this,” Will said as she disappeared around the corner. “I can’t remember if anyone’s ever cooked for her.”

“She’s lovely,” Hannibal said, gathering a few garlic cloves from the basket above the kitchen sink. “She deserves an evening where she’s doted on, don’t you think?”

“She does,” Will agreed with a smile.

They worked well together. Once Will was finished fileting the fish, he went into the garden to pick Hannibal some rosemary and fresh lemons. Hannibal was busy at the stove, so Will peeled and cut potatoes that Hannibal intended to roast with rosemary and olive oil.

He was distracting in the kitchen. Will had never really seen him in his element, but he thrived, here. His knife work was quick and sharp, his mincing done quickly and crisply. Will tried not to drool while watching his forearms shift with each movement of the blade in his hands, but he failed. He knew what those forearms looked like when his fist was wrapped around Will’s cock, and the movements weren’t all that different.

Will cut up all the vegetables he needed chopped for the salad, then regretfully had to leave the kitchen to set the table. His mother wandered over as he fluffed a clean tablecloth over the picnic tables, then began setting out silverware and glasses. “You’re cooking with Hannibal?” she asked with a laugh.

“*He’s* cooking,” Will grinned, lighting a few citronella candles to keep mosquitos away. “I am just chopping vegetables and setting the table.”

“Mafalda is thrilled,” she said, taking the pile of cloth napkins to fold them and set them at each place setting. “You’ve both made her night.”

“Make sure Anchise comes?” Will asked softly. “I know he doesn’t feel comfortable at the table with us, but… Hannibal really wants him to join.”

She watched Will knowingly while helping him set the table. “He likes you, you know.”

Will grimaced, moving around the table to place silverware there, too. “He’s better than me,” he admitted softly.

“He feels the same way about you.”

Will paused, glancing up at her in surprise. “Did he say that?”

“He did,” she shrugged. “Which makes you both good for one another, don’t you think?”

“He’s become a dear friend,” Will replied numbly, turning his eyes towards the table instead of his mother.

“To all of us,” she added with a smile. “He’s a part of this family, now. In so short a time. To think I was wary of him. It feels strange to think it, now.”

“He’s half-Italian,” Will blurted out, and his mother laughed.

“No wonder he’s so perfect,” she mimed, completely unaware that Will had just voiced something similar not hours before.

She kissed his cheek once the table was set, moving off to toward the orchard to no doubt speak with Anchise like Will asked her to. He headed back inside where Hannibal was working diligently at the stove. It smelled utterly divine, like garlic and butter and roasted potatoes. Seven plates were set out in a row on the counter, waiting for Hannibal to finish cooking. “What can I do?” Will asked, boldly going to his side to kiss his shoulder as he worked.

“Nothing else, beloved,” Hannibal replied without thought. He was clearly distracted, because he’d normally never allow Will to kiss him like this in plain view, nor respond so thoughtlessly with a term of endearment. “If you don’t mind letting everyone know dinner is in ten minutes? Then you can help me bring the plates to the table.”

“Sure thing,” Will grinned, taking liberties by kissing his shoulder again. He saw the corner of Hannibal’s mouth lift in a smile, then went out to let everyone know dinner was on its way.

After telling everyone that dinner would be ten minutes, he headed inside to open a few bottles of wine that Hannibal had set out for dinner that night. He'd chosen an Orvieto for dinner, which he assumed was because he'd used the white wine in their dish judging by the opened bottle by the stove.

He brought the wine bottles outside where his family was already sitting, setting the bottles to either end of the table. "Can I have a glass with dinner?" he asked his dad softly.

"One," his dad laughed, ruffling his curls as he leaned forward to put the bottle down.

"Thank you," Will grinned, jogging back to the house to help Hannibal bring their dinner out.

The plates were immaculate. A beautiful filet of fish was the star of the show, covered in a fragrant white wine sauce. The roasted potatoes were puffy and golden and clearly well-seasoned. There was a side of sauteed summer squash and zucchini with roasted tomatoes. "This is incredible," Will told him, raising his eyes to see Hannibal smile proudly.

"Are there salad plates outside?" he asked.

"You bet."

"Let's have dinner, then," he replied, pressing a kiss to Will's temple.

It took a few trips to get everything outside, but when they did, Mafalda clapped. "*Bello, bello*!" she laughed.

Will sat by Hannibal's side once all the plates were set down in front of everyone, and he raised his wine glass. "To friends that have become family," he said softly, eyes shining in the low afternoon light. "*Un grazie a tutti I presenti*!"

Everyone else raised their glasses, his father's smile wide. "*Alla famiglia*!"

A bare foot covered his under the table, and Will smiled to himself as they all dug in.

Dinner was incredible. It was on par with some of the best restaurants he'd been to in Milan as well as France. Even Mafalda was speechless, moving to Hannibal's side once dinner was finished to exchange recipe ideas in rapid fire Italian.

Conversation flowed easily, and Will took a glance around the table to savor this. This was what family was. Heated discussions about roasted potatoes and wine-induced laughter. His parents were talking animatedly with Mafalda's husband and Anchise, discussing the possibility of adding apple trees to the orchard next year.

Once dinner was over, Mafalda moved to do the dishes, and Hannibal stopped her. "I cooked," he reasoned. "I can clean up."

"Where did you come from?" Mafalda asked indignantly, grabbing his face to kiss his cheek with a big smack. "Come live here with us, *Tesoro*. You'll want for nothing, I assure you."

“It’s tempting,” Hannibal laughed, glancing at Will for a brief moment that stole Will’s heart. “So very tempting.”

He helped Hannibal with the dishes, drying them and putting them away as Hannibal handed them off. “You could, you know,” Will said softly. “Come live here.”

Hannibal’s hands paused in the soapy water, the smile that had been on his mouth the whole night faltering. “I can’t,” he said softly. “I need to finish my manuscript, and… you’ll be off to college next year. I can’t even imagine leaving this place. Leaving you. We both have… responsibilities. To others. To ourselves.”

His mother came in just as Hannibal had finished speaking, a wide smile on her face. “Thank you for dinner, *Caro*,” she said, pouring herself a glass of iced water from the fridge. “It was delicious.”

“Any time,” he promised with his false smile, the one he gave when he was forcing it.

“Will you play for us tonight?” she asked, kissing Will’s cheek while he put plates away in the cabinet. “It’s been too long, darling boy.”

“Sure,” he nodded. “Of course.”

Everyone moved into the living room once the dishes were done, and Will sat at the piano with a frown. He didn’t feel like playing. He felt like crying, and the mood he was in transferred over into the piece he’d chosen.

He played beautifully, but even his mother frowned when the piece came to a close. “So somber, my love,” she grimaced. “Is something wrong?”

“No,” he replied, casting a quick glance at Hannibal, who was also frowning. “Nothing is wrong.”

Hannibal came over slowly, putting his glass of wine down on the end table before sitting by Will’s side at the piano bench. “May I?” he asked.

Will’s eyes widened, and he nodded while shifting down the bench.

Hannibal played *beautifully*. He chose Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, and even his parents stopped speaking as he began to play. He didn’t even know that Hannibal could play the piano, and he wondered what else he didn’t know about him. How many facets of Hannibal were there?

In one day, he’d learned that Hannibal couldn’t fish, but he could sketch beautifully. He learned what his sister looked like, and the pain and guilt Hannibal felt whenever he’d thought about her. He found out that Hannibal was an incredible chef who could dominate a kitchen without even breaking a sweat.

He could also play the piano.

This is what being utterly in love with someone else feels like, Will realized. This was what it felt like to know that your heart lived in someone else's chest.

He stared at Hannibal throughout the piece, watching every minute facial expression he made as he played. He watched the way his muscles moved in his forearms. The way his slender fingers moved across the keys without hesitation.

A few strands of his hair fell forward, and Will wanted to sweep them aside with his fingers. Bury them in silken strands that smelled of chamomile shampoo, sweat, and sunshine.

It took him a moment to realize that Hannibal had finished playing. He was startled by the sound of Mafalda clapping, raising her glass to Hannibal in salute.

Hannibal's smile was almost shy, and he laughed while waving her off. He turned his gaze away from Hannibal's profile, looking at his family who were equally enraptured by Hannibal, also. All eyes were on him aside from his father's eyes, which were watching Will alone.

He blushed, dropping his eyes to the floor as Hannibal left the bench to sit with the others again. Will resumed playing, but he was distracted. His hands moved, but he couldn't say what he was playing.

Hannibal went up to bed before him, so Will intentionally stayed downstairs with everyone for another hour before announcing that he was heading to bed, too.

The urge to go to Hannibal was strong, but he resisted. He settled onto his twin bed after brushing his teeth and washing his face, naked save for a pair of boxer shorts. It was far too warm to bother with anything else.

He couldn't hear a sound from Hannibal's room, even though his ears were straining for anything at all. The creak of a bed spring. The deep inhale of a tired breath.

Nothing.

He sighed, turning his face towards the window where the moon hung huge beyond the tree line. All he could hear were crickets and the soft hush of wind through the trees. It was coming from behind the house, because the sweet scent of lavender was breezing through his opened windows.

Sleep wouldn't come to him, even though he was bone tired from not sleeping whatsoever the night before. His twin bed felt huge without Hannibal's body against him.

This is what it will feel like in less than two weeks when he's gone, he realized.

Just as he was about to drift off, the door between their rooms opened and closed, and Will blinked awake as Hannibal settled against his side, tugging Will into his arms despite the evening warmth.

He smelled of sweat and spicy cologne, his arms folding around Will's body to hold his back against his chest. His breath stirred Will's hair, where a kiss was pressed sweetly. "Can't sleep without you," he sighed.

"Let's move into the other room," Will mumbled, shifting around so he could bury his face in Hannibal's neck. "Bigger bed?"

"Here," Hannibal said exhaustedly. "Right here, where you can't roll away from me."

Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal, tangling their legs together beneath the sheet. Hannibal's chest hair tickled his chest, and he rubbed himself against him to tease himself further. "Today was perfect," he said softly.

"Every day with you is," Hannibal mumbled. "Sleep, beloved. Tomorrow is another day."

Will had gone hours without a kiss, so he leaned away enough to touch Hannibal's face, angling it down so their lips could meet. He felt Hannibal smile against his mouth, then their tongues swept the cavern of one another's mouths. His cock filled out between them, and he could feel Hannibal's, too. They ignored it, choosing instead to kiss softly and contentedly, each holding one another close until sleep took them.

Chapter End Notes

I am so far behind on replying to comments! I've been working doubles because we have a few people out with Covid. =\

Just know that I read and appreciate every. single. one. They're fuel for me, and they've made me smile when legit not much else has this last week, haha.

Love you guys!

Edit: ALSO this is the end of Chiara. She stirred all the shit I needed her to stir, and she will indeed be fucking off like Will suggested!

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He awoke alone the next morning, and he knew it was late by how the sun was slanting through his window. By the time he showered and got dressed, breakfast had already been served and Hannibal was nowhere in sight. “Where’s Hannibal?” he asked his father, who was in the kitchen speaking with Mafalda.

“Headed into town to pick up a few pages of his manuscript as well as fax a few new pages over to his publisher,” he replied. “Your mother and I are being picked up by your aunt in a few minutes. You want to come with us to her house?”

Will shook his head and yawned. “I’m still tired,” he said honestly.

“You had a busy day yesterday,” his dad laughed. “Mafalda and Manfredi are heading into town for groceries and supplies this afternoon. You’ll be alone if you don’t join us at your aunt’s house.”

“I am eating something and going back to bed,” Will laughed. “Have fun and tell everyone I said hello.”

“Alright,” his dad said, smiling when his mother walked into the room in a stunning yellow sundress. “Ready?” he asked.

“Is my darling boy coming with us?” she wondered.

“Your darling boy is going back to bed,” he chuckled, groaning when she hugged him tight and kissed each of his cheeks in rapid fire succession.

“We won’t be back until late,” she frowned, ruffling his hair with her fingers. “Please let Mafalda know we won’t be home for dinner tonight.”

“Will do,” he yawned.

After breakfast, he headed back upstairs just as he said he’d do. It was almost too hot to sleep, but he was tired enough that he wanted to try anyway. He listened to cicadas and birds chirping outside, his eyes sliding shut of their own accord.

The door between their bedrooms banged open, and Will startled. “Where is everyone?” Hannibal asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Mom and Dad are at my aunt’s house for the day,” Will said, flopping back down against the mattress. “Mafalda and Manfredi are out shopping and getting supplies. They won’t be home till dinner, probably.”

“Never seen the house empty,” Hannibal noted, hands on his hips. “Anchise?”

“Other end of the orchard,” Will mumbled. “Harvesting apricots, probably.”

“So…” Hannibal drawled. “We are alone?”

Will blinked up at him, a slow smile spreading across his face. “Yes,” he laughed.

Hannibal immediately stripped out of his tee shirt and shorts, moving towards Will gloriously naked and golden. Will laughed, rolling onto his back as Hannibal straddled him, hoisting his tee shirt up his torso and over his head. “I *was* sleeping,” he complained, though his eager fingers showed he wasn’t truly upset about being woken up.

“And now you’re hard as a rock,” Hannibal groaned, tugging Will’s shorts down his legs. “There’s no one around, and I want to hear you, Will. I want your voice and your moans. I want all of it.”

Will moaned in response as Hannibal sucked his cock down his throat, the urgency in the other man rubbing off on Will enough that he no longer felt tired. Hannibal sucked him off like he wanted to pull Will’s soul from his cock, harsh slurping sounds echoing in a way that they’d never allowed to happen before this.

Will came not a moment after, Hannibal’s mouth working him to completion expertly. Saliva dripped down to his balls, and Hannibal lapped that up, too. Will watched him, utterly breathless, as Hannibal rolled one of his testicles in his mouth, eyes dark as night.

“Fuck,” he groaned, arching his back as his cock twitched back to life on his stomach. “Fuck me. I need you to fuck me, Hannibal.”

Hannibal growled, biting the skin of Will’s inner thigh and sucking a bruise there. “On your stomach,” he said urgently.

Will rolled over on the small bed immediately, and Hannibal spread his cheeks and licked in without a moment of hesitation. Will moaned, and the sound was gutted. Tortured. Wet smacking noises echoed in the room before wet fingers pressed into him, stretching him open. “Yes,” Will gasped, rocking back against them. “Deeper. Harder. Come on, Hannibal,” he whined, fucking himself on Hannibal’s fingers urgently.

Hannibal bit his ass, teeth digging into his flesh as though he wanted to take a bite out of it. “Do you know what you do to me?” he asked, voice molten and deep. “Do you? Beautiful thing.”

“Hannibal,” he whined, dropping to his elbows to get better leverage. “I want you inside me,” he gasped. “I want your come and your cock inside of me.”

“Fuck,” Hannibal spat. He heard the cap of lube opening and closing, and then the blunt head of Hannibal’s cock was spearing him open.

“Yes,” he panted, rocking back as Hannibal slid forward. He felt Hannibal’s balls slap against his body, the heavy weight of them nestled tight against him. “Fuck,” he moaned, trying his

best to take in a breath with the feeling of being this full. It felt like Hannibal was in his stomach, he was so deep.

His rim burned where Hannibal stretched him, but it was barely background noise compared to how desperate he felt in that moment. “Fuck me hard,” he pleaded. “Make me scream, Hannibal.”

Strong hands gripped his waist, and then he began moving. His pace was brutal, their skin slapping hard with each drive of Hannibal’s hips. Will felt his body jolting up the bed with the force of each thrust, so he gripped the headboard in his hands, hoisting himself up while Hannibal fucked him with abandon. It felt like he was inside of Will's stomach, like he couldn't pull in a breath.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped, gripping Will’s shoulder. Will knew he was making noise, but he couldn’t hear it over the electricity coursing through his body. He felt like a livewire, energy snapping between them as quickly as Hannibal was burying himself inside of Will’s body.

There wasn’t an inch of space between them. Hannibal’s chest was pressed flush against Will’s back, his chest hair scraping Will’s sweaty spine with each movement he made. His arms were banded around Will’s torso, his thumb working Will’s nipple to the point where it almost felt like too much.

This is what it feels like to die from pleasure, he thought frantically. Each time Hannibal snapped his hips, his cock pummeled that little spot inside of him, rendering him utterly speechless. This was what it was like to be owned by someone else. To be so intensely the object of another person’s desire.

“Will,” Hannibal begged, fucking him with such firm, deep, snaps of his hips that Will was certain he’d die. A tight fist wrapped around his dripping cock, stroking him hard in time with Hannibal’s frenzied pace.

Will’s orgasm crashed over him, and he wailed while it tore him apart. It seemed to go on forever, each wave of endless bliss more intense than the moment before it. Hannibal worked his cock even afterwards, burying himself as deeply as he could as his own orgasm took him.

He felt Hannibal twitch and pulse inside of him, his seed hot as it painted his insides. He slumped back, resting his full weight in Hannibal’s lap while catching his breath. His lover grunted as the change in position forced his cock deeper, each wincing with overstimulation but neither moving to do a thing about it. “Stay,” Will rasped, voice utterly ruined. “Stay inside me.”

A gentle kiss pressed against his sweaty neck. “As long as you want me to.”

Soft fingers trailed over his stomach, sweat making them stick a bit. His come was almost everywhere. On the bed. On his stomach. Over Hannibal’s wrist and hand. He laughed, tilting his head back so he could rest it against Hannibal’s shoulder. “Did I hurt you?” he asked softly, lips brushing his neck with each word.

Will shivered. “Not even a bit,” he sighed. “Did I make enough noise for you?”

Hannibal chuckled, burying his nose into Will's sweaty nape while taking a deep inhale. "I wish I could hear it every night for the rest of my life."

You could, Will thought, though he banished the thought the moment it came to him. "What brought this on?"

"You didn't come down for breakfast," Hannibal said accusingly. "I missed you."

"Is that all it takes?" Will laughed. "I am missing breakfast from now on, then."

Strong arms held him tight while wet kisses were smeared against his neck and shoulder. "You'd better not. Besides, that wasn't the only reason."

"Oh?"

"Mafalda served fresh peach juice this morning," he admitted with a laugh. "It was missing something."

"Pervert," Will giggled.

"Takes one to know one," he quipped, soothing the sting by kissing Will's neck again. "I could kiss you here for days. Your scent here," he said, inhaling against his jawline, then licking it with the flat of his tongue. "Your taste. I could do this for days."

"So do it," Will moaned, tilting his head to the side just as Hannibal latched on to him, biting gentle kisses that wouldn't bruise against his throat.

"I wish I could," he sighed. "Let's shower together then clean up this mess."

Showering together was an intimate experience. He made sure to clean every inch of Hannibal from head to toe, and Hannibal responded in kind. Lazy kisses turned heated just as the water began to cool, and Hannibal pulled away. "Let's go," he sighed. "I don't want to press our luck."

Their luck extended in that Will hadn't come on the bottom sheet. Just the top one. Hannibal took it into the bathroom and scrubbed his come out at the bathroom sink before leaving it over the chair to dry. "Not so bad," he laughed, rejoining Will on the narrow bed. They laid on their sides, facing one another without a scrap of space between them. "I have to work on my manuscript today," he sighed.

"Go ahead," Will mumbled, feeling utterly exhausted again. "I'm going to nap I think."

"Would it bother you if I left the door open between our rooms?" he asked while stroking the side of Will's face.

"Not even a little bit," Will promised.

"Maybe we could go to dinner tonight?" Hannibal asked. "Just you and I?"

Will smiled, closing his eyes as Hannibal peppered his face in kisses. “There’s a pizzeria in town, if you like that?”

“Love it,” he replied immediately. “Get some rest. I’ll wake you in a few hours so we can head into town.”

“Lo-” Will bit his tongue, eyes slamming open as he realized what he’d just been about to say. Hannibal seemed to know, too, because he kissed Will full on the mouth.

“I know,” he sighed.

He slept for the better part of an hour before stumbling from his bed. The sheet that Hannibal had handwashed was dry given the heat of the day, so Will remade the bed before using the restroom. Hannibal was still busy scribbling away, opened books around him for reference. Will stayed quiet, snatching his favorite book of poetry from the bookshelf, then settled on Hannibal’s bed.

“Short nap,” Hannibal remarked, flicking a page crisply at the desk.

“Too hot,” he complained.

“That it certainly is,” he agreed with a laugh.

He buried his nose in his book of poetry by Gabriele D’Annunzio. He was Will’s favorite Italian poet, as his words were written so plainly from the heart that it made Will’s ache every time he read his poetry. He hadn’t read this book in a long time, and when he came across one poem, ‘*Rimani*,’ he had to blink back tears.

It had never struck home for him before this. It had never felt like it was written with Will in mind, but… now it held new meaning. That was the thing Will loved about poetry. Rereading them changed how you felt depending on life circumstances and time.

Time changed everything.

He set the book aside, sweeping tears discretely from his face before climbing from the bed. “Going to get something to drink,” he said softly. “Want something?”

“Peach juice,” Hannibal grinned without looking up from his work.

He took the book with him downstairs, rereading the poem with watering eyes.

Before they left for dinner, Will scribbled a note for Mafalda to let her know that she didn’t need to cook dinner for anyone but she and her husband as well as Anchise, as no one else would be home. Two nights off in a row for her, which would make her happy, he figured.

He and Hannibal rode their bikes into town, the sun setting behind the trees. He and Hannibal ordered a few slices of pizza and lemonade before heading outside to sit at the small tables that lined the sidewalk. “You’re terribly quiet,” Hannibal noted.

Will busied himself with a big bite of pizza, looping his finger around the string of mozzarella that stretched out with his bite. He shrugged noncommittally, keeping his eyes focused out towards the street instead of on Hannibal.

“Will,” he sighed. “What’s wrong?”

“Why are we over when you head home, Hannibal?” he blurted out, blushing fiercely at his lack of finesse. “Why can’t we talk long-distance? See each other over the holidays? Spend summers together until we can figure something else out?”

Hannibal swallowed his bite of pizza thickly, using a napkin to wipe his lips. “You want that from me,” he said in disbelief.

“How can you think I don’t?”

“Where are you planning to attend college?” he asked.

Will’s mouth fell open and he shrugged. “I… I don’t know, yet. My parents want me to attend Julliard, but… I’ve told you already that I don’t… I don’t want that.”

“You think you’d move to the states for school?” he asked, raising his eyebrow.

“I…” he shrugged again. “I don’t know, yet. Hannibal, it’s a year from now.”

“Precisely,” he said as if in agreement with a statement that Will didn’t make. “You’re going to meet other people. You think you’re going to… be *this* attached forever. What happens when we’re doing the long distance thing and you find someone that interests you?”

“I am not a cheater,” Will replied indignantly.

“Should I ask Marzia if that’s the case?” Hannibal said cruelly.

“How fucking dare you,” Will spat. “I was with her for a few months, Hannibal. It wasn’t serious, and it wasn’t… it wasn’t what you and I have. Nothing will ever be like what you and I have. I also didn’t know then that… that I preferred…”

“Men,” Hannibal stated, and Will nodded.

“I don’t think it’s fair to hold a grudge against me for… realizing who I am,” Will said defensively.

“I’m not holding a grudge,” he sighed. “I’m trying to set you free in the world, Will. You have an entire lifetime ahead of you to meet people and learn who you are. I was tied down at your age. Believe me when I tell you that you’ll learn to resent me just as I learned to resent-”

“Who?” Will asked, heart breaking.

“Bedelia,” Hannibal breathed. “She… she’s the daughter of my uncle’s business partner. For a long time, she and I dated because each of our parents wanted us to date. She’s a friend, and… it’s been on and off between her and I too many times to count, now.”

“Who cares what your uncle wants, Hannibal?” Will asked coldly.

“*I do*,” he sighed. “He took me in, Will. He saved me from the orphanage. He made sure my inheritance came to me, and he took care of me when no one else would. He’s a difficult man, but… it’s all he’s asked of me. I couldn’t even do that for him.”

Will’s heart was shattering in his chest, and he blinked back tears. “I used to think you had yourself all figured out,” he said coldly. “You don’t. It’s a mask. A person suit. You’re all stitched up tight with bravado and self-acceptance, but it’s not real. You’d rather live a life that someone else chooses for you than make a decision for *yourself*.”

“If your father asked you… *begged* you to keep seeing Marzia. If it was all he wanted of you in the world, you’d tell him that it was your life to do with as you pleased?”

“My father would never ask me to do that,” Will replied immediately.

“How lucky you are, then,” Hannibal grimaced, glancing away from Will pointedly.

“So you won’t,” Will said thickly. “You won’t keep in touch with me.”

“Of course I will,” Hannibal said immediately. “As a friend. As someone who cares very, very, deeply for you.”

“Does it have to do with me being a man?” Will asked softly.

Hannibal cleared his throat, and Will knew he’d hit the nail on the head. If Will was a woman, he’d have brought Will home whether his uncle liked it or not. “He’d disown me,” Hannibal admitted under his breath. “He’d never speak to me again.”

“This is about *you*, then,” Will realized. “You’re trying to make it my fault by saying I’m too young and that I have too many unknown partners I need to fuck out of my system to know what I really want, but it’s because of you. You can’t admit to your family who you are. You can’t risk your pish-posh colleagues and university friends knowing that you love sucking my cock in fear of what they’d think of you.”

“Your age plays a factor, too,” Hannibal said fiercely. “If I knew without a doubt that I was risking my relationship with my family and colleagues for someone that… for someone that would stay with me, then… it would be different, maybe. Life is going to keep us apart as it is, Will. There’s no getting around that. Time and distance will cause a rift, and… that will be it. I’ll have lost everything, including you.”

“Is it better to speak or die, Hannibal?” he whispered. He felt like his insides were made of shattered glass. Everything hurt. So this is what it feels like to be unappreciated, he thought.

“You know the answer to that,” Hannibal sighed. “Sometimes, whether you speak or not, the result is the same. Speak or die. Speak and die. One way or another, it ends the same.”

What more was there to say? Will could be angry with him and end this now, or he could spend a few more weeks with the love of his life and try to make memories that would sustain him for the rest of it. He stared at Hannibal’s unusually beautiful face, taking in each

detail of him as if it would be the last time he'd be allowed to do so. "I'll take anything you want to give me," Will said finally, throat thick with unshed tears. "Your friendship. Your affection. I'll take a letter once a year if that's all you want to give me. So long as you promise that you will give me something. Anything. A five-minute phone call to let me know you're alive."

"I already told you I would," Hannibal replied, his own voice thick with tears that shone in his eyes.

"I won't ask you again," Will promised softly. "I won't tell you how much I want you in my life, but I just want to speak it out loud for the last time so that there's no confusion on your part. I want you. I want everything you want to give me. Just because I'm not asking you doesn't mean that I don't want it."

"I don't deserve you," he said under his breath. "I don't even deserve your friendship, Will. You're better than me. Infinitely."

Will used to believe that Hannibal was better than him, too. Maybe in some ways, he was. He put his family's needs and wants above his own when Will knew without a doubt that he himself never would. His parents wanted him to attend Julliard for music, but… he already knew he wouldn't do that. It was *his* life, and he would live it as he chose to live it.

Disappointing anyone else was not on his list of concerns.

He nibbled on his pizza while considering that. If his parents disowned him for choosing something other than music, it might change his perspective. He couldn't imagine losing his parents over an argument. It was unthinkable to him. He might resent them for forcing him to do something he didn't want to do, but… he would still do it.

Family came above all else.

As much as he hated it, he understood where Hannibal was coming from. He understood that he himself would make different choices should his parents threaten to abandon him. They never would, but… if they did, it would change him.

"Look who it is!" a voice called from behind them. Will snapped out of his reverie and glanced over, watching as Paulo and Antony ambled over with cigarettes hanging from their mouths. "Where have you been?"

Will shrugged, shredding the crust of his pizza with his fingers. "At the house, mostly."

"We were just about to grab a slice and head down to the lake," Antony said, flicking ash from his cigarette. "Want to join us?"

Will glanced at Hannibal, whose face was utterly unreadable. "I don't… I don't know. I don't have my bathing suit."

"Never stopped you before," Antony laughed, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

“If you’d like to join your friends, you can,” Hannibal said, voice completely devoid of emotion. “I’ve got to get back to the house and work on my manuscript.”

The blank canvas of Hannibal’s face in that moment pissed Will off. He hadn’t seen that expression angled at him in over a few weeks, and it felt like a knife to the gut to see it. “Sounds good,” he said coldly, standing up to discard his trash in the barrel. “Later,” he tossed over his shoulder while walking away with Paulo and Antony.

He regretted it the moment he got to the lake. The moment he turned the corner from Hannibal’s sight, if he were to be honest. “Sorry bout the other night,” Antony said softly, lighting another cigarette while they walked to the lake.

“It’s alright,” Will shrugged, kicking a pebble down the dirt road. “We both had a bit too much to drink.”

“Maybe,” Antony agreed, sucking his cigarette hard enough to hollow his cheeks. “Stop me if I’m way out of line, but… I wasn’t that drunk. I was only drunk enough to admit something out loud that I’ve always wanted to do.”

“Antony,” Will sighed, crossing his arms defensively. “I… I’m sorry, but…”

“You’ve got something going on with him, don’t you?” he asked softly. Paulo was jogging ahead, clearly in a hurry to get to Chiara and the few others that were stripping down to go for a swim.

“What?” Will stammered. “No. No, nothing like-”

“Chiara told me,” he continued, making Will’s jaw snap shut. “Said you two were practically fucking in the pool when she came by.”

“We were not!” Will stuttered. “We were… it was a splash fight!”

“I’m not judging you for it,” Antony said, blowing smoke from the side of his mouth. “He’s a gorgeous man. He’s gorgeous, but he’s also… fleeting. He’s got what? Two more weeks here?”

Will swallowed thickly, nodding his head. “Just about,” he agreed.

“Listen,” he said, coming to a stop and grabbing Will’s arm to get him to do the same. “I’m going to just put it out there and see what happens. I like you. I think you’re beautiful. I don’t expect anything of it. I just… need to tell you in case that changes something on your end. I’ll wait till he goes if you want. Or I’ll bugger off and stop saying anything at all. It’s all up to you, Will.”

It felt wrong. It felt all, all, wrong. Will couldn’t imagine himself out with Antony. Couldn’t imagine allowing Antony to kiss him. The thought of his hands on Will’s body made his gut churn, even though Antony was in all honestly, absolutely beautiful. Young, but beautiful.

Young, he thought. *He's your age*.

He'd never really considered people that were his own age his age, though. Will had always been ahead of them, too old of a soul in too young of a body. He didn't care to go out and get fucked up every night. He wasn't constantly worried about… *getting his dick wet*, as Paulo sometimes put it.

Antony was just a boy in a lot of ways. He chain smoked and did drugs and drank nightly. He partied hard and cared very little for quiet time or reading a good book.

Will grimaced, looking away from him. "I… I'm flattered. I'm not ready for anything else, yet."

"Understood," Antony chirped, flicking his cigarette butt away. "Time for a swim?"

"Yeah," Will shrugged, glancing down the road that would lead him home. "Let's go swim."

It ended up not being a bad time, really. It felt good to let loose, even if his mind was preoccupied. There were a few girls that Will didn't really know, and everyone stripped down to their underwear to go for a swim. They swam and did chicken fights, though Will wasn't really brawny enough to carry the weight of any of the girls on his shoulders.

He tried to with the smallest girl, Marcella, and she toppled off his shoulders the moment he came to his feet. His neck hurt where she grabbed at him when she fell, and he decided to leave the chicken fighting to the others.

Still, it was funny to watch. He spent the rest of the night laughing, doing his best to set aside the heaviness weighting down his heart.

By the time he crept back home, he was tired and cold. He got water up his nose while trying to lift Marcella out of the water, and his neck was truly hurting him.

All the lights were out, so he went upstairs quietly, doing his best not to disturb anyone along his way.

Hannibal's bedroom and bathroom doors were shut tight, and Will sighed while climbing into his own bed, curling in on himself. He could have Hannibal here right now, he thought. He could go to him.

He did neither, choosing instead to fall asleep above the covers.

He woke up earlier than he thought he would, washing quickly and brushing his teeth like lightning. He wanted to get downstairs and make it to breakfast with everyone. He wanted to cover Hannibal's foot with his own and beg him with his eyes to forgive him for causing a rift in the first place.

He pulled a tee shirt on while heading downstairs, shaking out his still-wet hair from his shower. His parents were having breakfast with Hannibal at the table, and he smiled in victory that he'd made it. "Morning," he greeted, kissing his mother on the cheek.

He sat by Hannibal's side, flicking his eyes up to find Hannibal staring at his neck with a murderous expression on his face.

He frowned in response, thanking Mafalda as she set down a four-minute egg in front of him. "*Mio Dio*!" Mafalda exclaimed. "Your neck, Caro!"

Will went cold while reaching up to touch the base of his throat, finding the skin sensitive and uncomfortable. "Someone had a good night," his dad laughed.

"Tell whoever did that to you that it's immature of them," his mother said distastefully. "Marking one another? Will, you were not raised like that."

"*Marked* me?" Will asked in confusion. "That's not what-"

Hannibal stood swiftly, pushing his finished egg away from him. "I have a few errands to run," he announced coolly. "I won't be back until later."

"Is there anything I can do? Need the car?" his dad wondered.

"No, thank you," he said before turning and stalking away.

Will came to his feet and ran into the house, going into the living room where a mirror hung behind the bar. At the base of his throat was a three-inch, deep purple, bruise. It was caused by Marcella's fingers as she toppled from his shoulders, but it looked like…

It looked like a fucking massive hickey.

He hauled ass outside, jogging to his bike to find Hannibal as quickly as possible. He pedaled madly, relief sweeping through him when he saw him on his own bike up ahead.

He caught up to him, out of breath and sweating in the early morning heat. "Hannibal!" he called. "*Wait*!"

"Go *home*, Will," he spat.

"Stop!" he yelled, coming to Hannibal's side. He reached out and grabbed Hannibal's handlebar. "*Stop*. Please?"

Hannibal slammed on the bike's brakes, the bike sliding in the dirt and squeaking the entire way. Will deflated in relief, sagging over his own handlebars as his own bike came to a stop.

Sweat was pouring down his back, and he gasped in some much-needed air. “What?” he asked coldly, eyes fixed on the bruise on Will’s throat.

“It’s *not* what it looks like,” he gasped. “It’s not *that*. We had… chicken fights in the water. I tried to pick a girl up on my shoulders, but I couldn’t lift her. I’m… I wasn’t strong enough to lift her. She fell off and grabbed at me when she fell. This is from her *fingers*, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s shoulders slumped a bit, the tension in his face smoothing out. “Nothing happened, then,” he said softly.

“Nothing happened,” Will promised, though he had no idea why it would even bother Hannibal if it did. “Would it really bother you that much even if it did?”

Hannibal’s eyes flashed at him. “Of course it would.”

“Why? You don’t… you don’t *want* me,” Will pointed out ruefully.

“I want you more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life,” Hannibal rasped, eyes glinting like molten amber. “It doesn’t change that I have to leave in two weeks, Will. It doesn’t change that for the next five years our lives will be heading in opposite directions of one another.”

“It’s only five years,” Will reasoned.

“Five years ago, you were twelve,” Hannibal chuckled. “Think about how much you’ve changed since then.”

Will grimaced at that, glancing away from Hannibal while a blush crept up his face. “While you’re here, there won’t be anyone else but you. Okay?”

“I promise the same,” Hannibal said softly.

“Good,” Will sighed. “Do you… do you really have errands to run?”

“Yes,” Hannibal chuckled. “I have a few pages of my book to submit to my editor. Would you join me?” Will nodded, giving his forehead a quick sweep to mop up the sweat there. Hannibal watched him for a moment, then leaned over his handlebars to press a kiss to Will’s cheek. “Forgive me?” he asked softly.

“What for?”

“Assuming the worst,” Hannibal sighed, kissing Will’s cheek again. “For thinking I have any right to be angry in the first place.”

“Nothing to forgive,” Will said dismissively, leaning away to put his foot on the pedal. “Let’s go?”

Neither one of them really had breakfast, so they stopped in at a gastronomia for sandwiches and bottles of water before heading out to sit in the plaza. “What would you like to do today?” Hannibal asked.

“Didn’t you have… things to do? For the day?”

Hannibal finished chewing his bite of food, looking a little more than remorseful. “I was going to work on my manuscript,” he shrugged. “It’s so beautiful out that I don’t particularly want to right now.”

“Want to go back to my spot?” Will asked.

“That,” Hannibal grinned. “That sounds perfect.”

After lunch, they pedaled out to the spring pools at a leisurely pace. The sun was scorching hot, and the humidity was high. There was no shade for most of their journey, and Will felt himself drooping by the time they pulled up onto the grassy hilltop.

He stripped his tee shirt, wincing as it stuck to him completely as it was soaked in sweat. He threw the shirt right into the spring pool, rinsing it as clean as he could in the water before hanging the shirt on a tree branch to dry.

He grinned when he watched Hannibal do the same thing, each stripping down to their underwear before wading into the icy water. “It feels like knives,” Hannibal laughed.

“Feels good,” Will grinned. The deepest part of the spring was possibly two feet deep, the water utterly crystal clear. He sat down in it with a hiss, laying out flat to immerse his over-heated skin completely. Hannibal’s stunned face loomed down at him, eyes roaming over his prone form in shock. “You’re going to catch pneumonia,” he scolded.

“It only stings for a moment,” Will laughed, wiggling his overheated limbs in the water. He stretched his arms out by his sides, fiddling with smooth stones under the water with his fingertips. “Then it feels like the best thing that’s ever happened to you.”

Hannibal looked dubious, but he went to his knees first, hissing and wincing as more and more of his skin met the water. He eventually laid flat by Will’s side with a shuddering breath, abdominal muscles contracting as though he wanted to levitate out from the water by sheer force of will.

It took a few minutes, but eventually Hannibal sighed. “Okay,” he conceded. “This is good.”

“Told you,” Will laughed.

Their icy fingers met under the water, lacing together as they floated while staring up at the canopy of willow trees over their heads. “Your father suggested that I spend my last week in Bergamo,” Hannibal said after a few beats of silence. “He said it might be helpful for my research.”

The thought was utterly unthinkable. Here he was, imagining that they had two more weeks together, and it was more like eight days. He sat up, icy water from his hair traveling down

his back before coming to his feet abruptly. Hannibal sat up cautiously, his eyebrows drawn together as if he were confused. “When did he suggest that?”

“Yesterday,” Hannibal admitted. “I asked him if you could join me, Will. I brought it up because I wanted to ask if you’d come.”

Will blinked down at him in surprise. “He said yes?”

“He did,” Hannibal agreed. “Said it would be good for you but would let you make your own decision about it.”

“Yes,” Will blurted, a laugh bubbling out of him. “Of course, I’ll go with you.”

Hannibal reached up and snatched his fingers, tugging him down again so that he was straddling Hannibal’s waist. He sat up, arms banding around Will’s middle while licking icy water from the hollow of his bruised throat. “It will be a week with me alone,” Hannibal warned in a teasing tone. “Hotels and traveling. Just you and I,” he groaned, nipping lightly over where the bruise was.

“What a chore,” Will laughed, lacing his fingers through Hannibal’s wet hair before kissing him soundly.

“Do you think…” Hannibal asked with a sigh as Will trailed wet kisses down the column of his throat. “Do you think they *know*, Will?”

“About us?” Will asked, pulling away a bit to make eye contact.

Hannibal licked his lips while trailing his eyes over Will’s face. Soft fingers slid down the side of his face briefly, and Hannibal nodded. “It feels like… it feels like they know, which is crazy because it also feels like they… approve of me. Why would they approve of me?”

“I told you that my parents got married when my mom was my age,” Will shrugged. “They are very accepting people. They don’t care what religion you are, what your skin color is. They don’t care who you love, so long as you love them. They’re good people, Hannibal.”

“Maybe that’s a part of why you’re so beautiful inside,” Hannibal remarked, eyes still watching Will with what looked like awe. “Almost more beautiful inside than you are on the outside.”

Will laughed, turning his face away when he felt his cheeks heat with a blush. “Which is saying something?”

“Truly saying something,” Hannibal agreed. “You are so beautiful right now in this moment that I am having difficulty pulling in a breath, Will.”

“Have you seen my ears?” Will teased.

“Adorable,” Hannibal sighed, leaning forward to nibble on the shell of Will’s ear with gentle teeth and soft lips. “Every bit of you,” he breathed into Will’s ear, making him shiver, “is

beautiful." Will shivered again, but not because of Hannibal. "Even when your lips are blue," Hannibal laughed.

"Let's get out of the water?" Will stuttered, teeth chattering.

"Before you catch your death, yes," Hannibal smiled.

They ended up back on the berm where they'd first kissed. This time, Hannibal didn't push him away when he straddled Hannibal's waist. This time, he moaned as Will licked into his mouth, pressing their bare chests together.

Their cocks ground together between them, wet boxer shorts clinging enough that Will could see all of him. "I wish I could take you inside of me," he moaned, rocking over Hannibal in small little circles of his hips.

Hannibal groaned, hands grasping Will's ass through his wet underwear. They slid inside, palming Will's cheeks roughly. "I wish that, too," he admitted breathlessly.

Will pressed him back with palms against his furred chest, all of him laid out like a feast for Will's eyes. The sunlight filtered through the trees above them, making his skin look impossibly golden in the green grass. His eyes were a shade that Will didn't even think existed, like dark honey in sunlight.

His hands slid free from Will's boxers, gliding up the flat expanse of his chest. His hands were so big that one of them almost spanned the width of his chest when his fingers were splayed out. He felt small around Hannibal, and he found he liked that, too.

He gripped Hannibal's wrist, pulling his hand up so he could trace the veins at the top of his hand with his tongue. Hannibal swallowed thickly while watching him as he sucked Hannibal's finger into his mouth, rolling his tongue over the pad of the digit to taste him.

"These hands," Will said after releasing his finger from his mouth. "I think about them constantly."

"Do you?" Hannibal breathed.

"Yes. I think about them against my skin. I think about these fingers inside of me. They haunt me, Hannibal," he said, licking his soft knuckles with the flat of his tongue.

"Let me give you something to remember, then," Hannibal said softly. He rolled them until Will was under him, then spread his hands across Will's body as if shielding him from something that Will couldn't see. He watched as Hannibal slid his hands down, tugging Will's boxer shorts to his thighs. "Your skin is like silk," Hannibal said, almost to himself.

"Touch me," Will pleaded, watching those big veiny hands grip his cock. His relieved moan echoed around them, but his kept his eyes on what Hannibal was doing. The way his cock slid in Hannibal's fist, igniting a fire in his belly.

Hannibal cupped and rolled his balls in one hand while the other jerked him off slowly, smearing his thumb over the head of his cock occasionally. It felt so good he almost couldn't keep his eyes open, but he wanted to see this. He wanted to recall it perfectly once it was over.

In a swift movement, Hannibal let him go, then tugged his own underwear down his thighs. He aligned them so their cocks were together before wrapping his big hand around them both, stroking them slowly enough that Will's toes curled in the grass. "Christ," he sighed.

He took his time working them together in his fist. They each dribbled and leaked, and Hannibal gathered their slick in his hands to make the glide easier. Even that turned Will on, knowing that they were combined like that. Each of them wet and smeared with the other as much as themselves.

It was that thought that sent him over the edge, his hips thrusting up through his orgasm as he and Hannibal's eyes met. Hannibal kept him in his fist as he worked himself to completion, his pace a little harder. A little rougher.

The way he liked it, Will realized.

He spilled against Will's bare chest not a moment after, and this time Will reached up to rub their combined essence into his skin.

Hannibal's eyes darkened, and he snatched Will's filthy hand to lick his palm clean.

Another rinse in the spring was necessary, but each settled back out in the grass afterwards with a contented sigh. They laid on their backs with their dried shirts under them, shoulder to shoulder with their hands laced between them. "Was Marzia your first?" Hannibal asked out of nowhere.

Will blushed, turning his head to take in Hannibal's merely curious expression. "Yes," he admitted softly. "I wish I would have waited for you. I wish you would have been."

"I didn't ask because of that," Hannibal promised. "I was just… curious. If you enjoyed her as much as you enjoy our encounters."

"I don't think anything will ever compare to you," he admitted with a grimace. "I don't know, really. It wasn't… bad. She and I… we've done other stuff. I used my mouth on her once. Once. It was… really kind of gross."

Hannibal laughed, shaking his head. "I don't like doing that to women, either. I'll exhaust all other efforts before doing that."

Will laughed, something inside of him somewhat placated that Hannibal didn't like it, either. "Do you like it for me?"

"I would do it all day if I could," Hannibal sighed. "Your taste. The feel of your hot skin against my tongue. The weight of you in the back of my throat… all day. I would die doing it

so I could die happy."

"I feel the same way about you, too," Will grinned, wiggling his feet through cool blades of grass. Hannibal's hand interlaced with his own, his sharp amber eyes turning their joined hands as though memorizing them.

"The sex wasn't… horrible," Will elaborated. "It was over in a minute, so how could I really say? Being inside of you was much better. Tighter? I don't know, really."

"I agree with you," Hannibal grinned, raising their intertwined fingers to press a kiss against his knuckles. "I don't know if I like women in that way. I can do it, but… afterwards… I hate myself for it."

"I didn't hate myself after Marzia," Will admitted. "I think I only did it to make you jealous, which is fucking awful of me. She's been my friend since I was little, and I threw it all away because I wasn't using my brain. I'm a dickhead."

"No," Hannibal said immediately. "No, Will. You're learning who you are and what you like. There are going to be broken hearts along the way, but you'll be alright."

"Who was your first time?" Will asked.

Hannibal smiled, shaking his head with a laugh. "Angelica Basilone. It was over in a minute for me, too."

"You?" Will laughed. "You're so good at it now."

"As are you," Hannibal chuckled.

Will rolled onto his side as the sun dipped below the tree's canopy, casting them in late afternoon golden light. He pressed a kiss over Hannibal's heart, lacing his fingers through his chest hair before kissing the plump pout of his upper lip. "What's your favorite food?"

Hannibal laughed, fingers threading through Will's curls that had dried in wild disarray. "Peaches," he chuckled.

"Pervert," Will laughed, rolling on top of him again. He straddled Hannibal's waist, leaning over him to lick into his mouth.

Hannibal grasped him closer, threading his fingers through Will's hair to angle his head for a deeper kiss. "What's your favorite food, Will?" he breathed, smiling with his eyes closed while trailing his fingers down Will's chest.

"Apricocks," he giggled.

With his hands pressed over Hannibal's chest, he felt Hannibal's vibrant laugh as much as he heard it. "Goose," he accused affectionately, kissing Will's cheek while laughing.

"Favorite color?" Will wondered, giggling when Hannibal's fingers tickled him against his ribs.

“Blue,” Hannibal said indecisively while staring into Will’s eyes. “Maybe green, right now.”

“Right now?”

“Your eyes are green right now,” he elaborated, a pretty blush rising on his cheeks. Will’s own felt hot with the admission, and he ducked his head to hide it. “What about you?”

“Red,” Will said immediately. “Red like Billowy. Like wet bathing suits that cling to your butt.”

“Goose,” he repeated, cheeks heating to the exact shade that Will loved so much.

“Tell me something you’re good at,” Will demanded while dipping his head to suck on Hannibal’s collarbone. Gentle fingertips traced up his spine, making him shiver. “Something weird, Hannibal. Something no one else knows about.”

Hannibal thought for a moment, his bottom lip wedged between his teeth. “I can swordfight,” he said after a beat, making Will laugh. “My Aunt Murasaki made sure I had katana training when I was younger, even if I will never, ever, use it in real life.”

“I would love to see you with a katana,” Will giggled, tipping his head back while Hannibal pressed kisses down his throat. “That would be something to see, I’m sure.”

“Your turn,” he chuckled. “A weird talent, Will.”

Will debated that, sitting up in Hannibal’s lap so he could think. Hannibal was making it difficult, his thumbs dipping into Will’s damp boxers in an exploratory caress. “I can whistle with a blade of grass,” he laughed.

“Show me,” Hannibal grinned.

Will reached out to pick a thicker blade of grass, wedging it between his two thumbs like a reed. He brought his thumbs to his mouth and pushed air through the space, the most obnoxious noise ever echoing off the rolling hills around them.

The sound stunned Hannibal for a moment before his laughter vibrated them both. “Goose!” he bellowed, rolling their bodies so he could tickle Will without mercy.

Their laughter became breathy whimpers as their mouths met, and Will forgot that he had more questions for the time being.

Chapter End Notes

Hello darlings! Longer chapter for you guys this week because I am going away next week. If I can post something come Friday-ish, I will do so to make up for it. I can't make a promise, though.

We're almost done with Italy and about to flash forward to 1994. Just a few more chapters, I think.

Love you guys!

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They got back to the villa just as the sun was setting. There were cars in the driveway, which meant that Mafalda was cooking for an army again. “I’m going to help Mafalda with dinner,” Hannibal said knowingly while ditching his bike against the house. “See you soon?” he asked.

Will wanted to go to him and press a kiss against his mouth, but that was far too risky given all the commotion coming from the backyard. “Later,” he agreed.

His cousins, aunts, and uncles were over as well as a few friends of his parents. His mom was under the lime tree with a former colleague, each puffing away on a cigarette with a glass of wine in hand.

“There’s my son!” his mother beamed. “Where did you go, darling boy?”

“To my reading spot,” he shrugged. “Lost track of time.”

“Is Hannibal coming back for dinner do you think?”

“I think he’s in the kitchen with Mafalda,” Will said uncertainly. “I think I saw him when I came in.”

“He’s an angel, isn’t he?” she sighed.

His cousins were at the picnic table playing Briscola, so he went to join them. “Haven’t seen you all summer,” his cousin Andre noted while dealing out cards to them.

“I’ve been here every time you’re here,” Will laughed.

“You don’t hang,” his other cousin, Giacomo scolded. “We used to hang.”

“I’ll be around soon,” Will promised. “Dad’s been keeping me busy, but… in a few weeks it’ll pass.”

“Ah,” Andre nodded. “House guest taking up your time, then.”

“He’s a good guy,” Will shrugged, avoiding eye contact in case his face betrayed him. “I like him better than the last one.”

“Sampson?” Giacomo laughed. “Was that his name? The guy that brought cd’s here? Like we have cd players. What an ass.”

“Samuel,” Will laughed. “Not Sampson.”

“Whatever his name was,” Andre laughed. “He was an idiot.”

“You think Hannibal has a thing for Mafalda?” Giacomo wondered, eyes fixed on Hannibal while he helped Mafalda set the table. “He’s kind of always helping her out.”

“He likes to cook,” Will shrugged again. “He also likes to be helpful. She’s going to miss him more than anyone else when he’s gone.”

“I don’t know,” Andre said knowingly. “I think you’ll miss him, too.”

“Why do you say that?” Will asked defensively.

“Because you’re always looking for him,” he shrugged. “You’re always aware of what he’s doing and where he is. I wish I got to know him a little better. He seems like a good guy.”

Will hummed in agreement half-heartedly, eyes drifting back to Hannibal who was being kissed by Mafalda on each cheek.

The following eight days flew by. Hannibal had intense deadlines, which took up most of his days with writing and biking to and from town with pages that needed editing and revising. There simply wasn’t time for any more day trips together, which meant that their evenings were full when they were able to steal away to their rooms.

They’d retreat to the gardens sometimes, each laying on the rock wall together while talking in hushed whispers.

Their days were generally spent apart, but their nights were a blur of sweaty skin and soft moans as they came together. Will learned that his favorite position was when he rode Hannibal into the mattress, taking his pleasure at his own pace while Hannibal licked and sucked at his skin.

He learned that Hannibal liked to be taken from behind the best. He liked when Will fucked him hard and fast, skin clapping together far too loudly for the deafening quiet in the night. They’d at least learned to lay out a few towels before they made love, which made clean up much easier.

There were a few nights where they never fell asleep. Each determined to press their desire into the other, to make one another feel like they were one for as long as they could before the sun rose and tore them apart again.

He retreated to his own room one morning after spending the night in Hannibal’s arms, body sore and tired from their intimacy. That’s when he noticed it on his desk.

A sketch of two hands interlaced, palms clasped together. It was their hands, he knew. He knew Hannibal’s hands as well as he knew his own. His flesh tone was left light and pale as the paper, his long fingers threaded through Hannibal’s slightly bigger ones. Hannibal had

shaded his own hand lightly, perfectly indicating how golden and beautiful he was, even if the sketch was only from their wrist down.

He signed it with a neat little ‘HL’ in the lower right corner. The sketch was absolutely beautiful, and it brought tears to Will’s eyes as he stared at it. He wanted to trace every line of charcoal with his fingers, but he would never dare. If he smudged it, he’d never, ever, forgive himself.

He needed a frame for it. That much was certain.

After tucking it carefully out of sight, he went to gather his clothes for his morning shower.

He had a gift in mind for Hannibal, too.

On their last day in Lombardy before leaving for Bergamo, Will sat at his desk in his room while Hannibal spent the afternoon in his dad’s study. He had his worn copy of poetry by Gabriele D’Annunzio opened with a pen in his hand.

On the inside cover, he wrote:

Will,
If I love myself, then I love you.
If I love you, then I love myself.

In us, there is no beginning and no end. We are the same.
I’ve given you my heart. My soul. My name.

All my love,
Hannibal

He flipped to the poem that he loved most, translating it on the side of the page even though Hannibal didn’t need him to translate it for him. He wanted Hannibal to flip through the book and *know* why he was receiving it, just by Will’s handwriting.

Rimani! Riposati accanto a me.
Non te ne andare.
Io ti veglierò. Io ti proteggerò.
Ti pentirai di tutto fuorchè d’essere venuto a me, liberamente, fieramente.
Ti amo. Non ho nessun pensiero che non sia tuo;
non ho nel sangue nessun desiderio che non sia per te.
Lo sai. Non vedo nella mia vita altro compagno, non vedo altra gioia.
Rimani.
Riposati. Non temere di nulla.
Dormi stanotte sul mio cuore…

Stay! Rest beside me.
Do not go.
I will watch you. I will protect you.
You'll regret anything but coming to me, freely, proudly.
I love you. I do not have any thought that is not yours;
I have no desire in the blood that is not for you.
You know. I do not see in my life another companion, I see no other joy
Stay.
Rest. Do not be afraid of anything.
Sleep tonight on my heart…

With his throat clogged with tears, he pressed a few sprigs of lavender from behind the house into the pages. He used another book to weight it down, pressing them into the old book where they would eventually dry.

He packed it into his own travel bag later that night, not quite ready to give it to Hannibal just yet. Giving it to him felt too much like goodbye, and he still had seven days with him in Bergamo.

They were leaving early the next morning, so they had dinner together with his parents, Mafalda, Manfredi, and Anchise. The dinner had a somber feel to it, as absolutely no one wanted Hannibal to leave them.

He and Hannibal did not make love that night. Instead, they laid together without a stitch of clothing between them, kissing softly while their hands roamed over one another. “This room feels more like my home than anywhere else I’ve ever lived,” Hannibal sighed.

Moonlight streamed through the window while the scent of lavender stirred the air. Mafalda’s chamomile detergent hung heavy on the sun-dried sheets under them, the scent of Hannibal’s skin teasing his nose with salt, coconut sunscreen, and sweat. “Being with you feels like being home,” Will said softly while weaving his fingers through Hannibal’s hair. “Comfortable. Peaceful. I don’t know how I’m going to sleep in this room once you’re gone.”

Hannibal swallowed thickly, tucking Will against himself so that his limbs were wrapped around Will like a blanket. “We still have a week,” he rasped.

“We’ll make the best of it,” Will promised.

A taxi arrived for them right after breakfast, each of them tossing their bags into the trunk while his family stood around them with tears in their eyes. His father came forward first, and Hannibal extended his hand for a shake which his father completely ignored. Hannibal was tugged into a fierce hug, and he laughed weakly while returning it. “This is always going to be your home,” his father promised. “You come as much as you like. You’re always welcomed.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal blurted, wiping his face of a stray tear as he pulled away. “This was… an incredible experience. Thank you for having me.”

“Anytime,” his father promised.

His mother hugged him next, pressing a kiss to each of his cheeks. “Not many have made an impact on us as you have,” she sighed. “We’ll miss you dearly, Caro. Come stay with us soon, yes?”

Hannibal nodded. “As soon as I can,” he promised.

Mafalda handled him leaving the worst, as she clung to him like a limpet while sobbing her eyes out. Hannibal held her tight, and she sniffled while touching his face. “Whoever marries you will be the luckiest woman alive,” she laughed. “You’re a blessing, *Tesoro*. Do you have your seeds from the garden?”

“I do,” he smiled, leaning forward to press a kiss to her cheek. “You’ve been like a mother to me. Thank you for taking such good care of me while I was here.”

“You come live here, and I will dote on you until I cannot,” she laughed, though she touched his shoulder to let him know she understood why he couldn’t stay. “We love you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s eyes welled with tears as he nodded, and his parents hugged Will quickly as Hannibal climbed into the backseat of the taxi. “See you soon, my love,” his mother whispered against his temple. “Take care, alright? Be safe.”

“I will,” Will promised.

Will climbed into the taxi, and Hannibal waved as the taxi pulled out from their driveway. His face was red and his eyes swollen with tears that escaped occasionally as they pulled out onto the road. The taxi driver barely cast them a glance, so Will reached out to lace their fingers together between them.

Hannibal gripped them tight, wiping his face with his other hand discretely as they left the villa behind.

The bus left from Crema, which took them the rest of the way to Bergamo.

Will had never been there, before. The city was completely surrounded by mountain ranges, the air somehow even more fresh than it was at the villa. Hannibal looked fascinated as they made their way to their hotel, taking in the old churches and buildings with rapt interest. “This is so lovely,” he sighed.

Their hotel room was not the greatest, but it did have its own bathroom and a queen sized bed. The view from the small balcony was incredible, as they faced north towards the endless mountain ranges around them.

The moment their bags were set down, Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal to give him the hug he'd been dying to give him since they left the villa two hours ago.

Hannibal hugged him back just as fiercely, burying his nose in Will's curls. "It feels like I left a part of myself behind," Hannibal said thickly. "It feels like… a hole in me. I *love* them, Will. Your family. I love them."

"They love you, too," Will promised, and he felt Hannibal shudder in his arms, his embrace turning desperately tight. Will let him hold on as tightly as he needed to, comforting him in any way he thought might help. "You're always welcome, Hannibal. You can come back whenever you want to."

"If I come back, I will never leave again," Hannibal sighed. "I know myself enough to know that."

Then don't leave, Will thought, crushing him in his arms a little tighter. Stay.

Stay.

Their first night in Bergamo was quiet. They went to dinner at a small café in the square, then headed back to the hotel to shower and change before heading out for drinks.

They never made it out for drinks.

Hannibal had him in the shower, his chest pressed against the tile wall while he licked between Will's cheeks, suckling his entrance with lips and tongue. They ended up in their bed with Will straddling Hannibal's waist, his cock buried deep inside Will's body as he rocked over Hannibal slowly, grinding his hips at a glacial pace that had them both sweating and moaning as they caressed one another's skin with their fingertips and mouths.

When he felt like he was going to come, he stopped moving completely. Their mouths dragged wetly, tongues licking sweat from one another's bodies until the urgency passed and he could roll his hips without feeling like he was about to come. He'd never forget how Hannibal watched him, then. His eyes were dark, lips reddened and wet from Will's mouth. His large hands held Will's hips, thumbs pressing into his hipbones to urge him on.

When they came, Hannibal rolled them over and spread Will open, licking and sucking himself from Will's body until Will was hard and aching again.

They headed out early the next morning, despite their very, very, late night. Hannibal wanted to hike up into Monte venturosa to see the waterfall. Their joy was palpable. Hannibal laughed freely while jogging up the path, turning to Will while yelling out, "Hannibal!"

His name echoed in the valley of the mountains, bouncing back to their ears. "Will!" he yelled in response, laughing as Hannibal picked him up and spun him around while kissing him soundly.

It was too chilly up this far in the mountains to ditch their clothes, but he still fell back into the grass when Hannibal straddled his waist, kissing him so vigorously that they both clawed one another through their rain jackets.

They went to dinner when they came back, then went right out for drinks without returning to the hotel. They drank too much, and each were far from careful while they danced along the sidewalk as they walked back to the hotel. Hannibal's arm was around his waist, each giggling madly without a care in the world.

They bumped into someone in their dancing, and the man turned on the sidewalk as they meandered up the street. "Hannibal?" a voice called.

He felt Hannibal stiffen in his arms, then extricate himself from Will's embrace. "Richard?"

"What on earth are you doing in Bergamo?" the older man laughed. He was wearing a tailored suit that fit him like a glove, even with his generous belly in consideration.

"Working on my manuscript," he said, shoulders rising in a protective gesture.

"Ah," Richard nodded. "Your uncle told me you were doing that. Is Bedelia with you?" he asked, glancing at Will with a scornful expression on his face.

"She and I are not together," Hannibal admitted softly.

"Too bad," Richard chuckled. "Thought for sure she'd be Mrs. Lecter by now. Who is this?"

"This is Will Graham," Hannibal said numbly, and Will held his hand out for a handshake that the man did not accept. "He's the son of Harrison Graham."

"Professor Graham!" Richard exclaimed, then reached for Will's hand immediately. "Nice to meet you. A colleague of mine stayed with your father two years ago. Andrew Perkins?"

Will nodded. "I remember him."

"Good man," Richard laughed. "So you went to the villa to write. Now I understand. Where is Professor Graham? I haven't seen him in ages."

Hannibal swallowed thickly, glancing at Will almost helplessly. "He's… at the villa. Not with… us."

Richard's warm smile dissipated, and Will watched him discretely rub the hand that Will had shaken against his pantleg as if removing dirt from it. "I *see*."

"It was nice to see you," Hannibal said, backing away from him slowly. "Tell Stephanie I said hello."

"Right," Richard grimaced.

They turned and walked briskly down the sidewalk, Will jogging to keep up with his pace. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped, rounding the corner where their hotel was. “Not now.”

They crashed into their room, where Hannibal immediately tugged at his hair in frustration. Will watched him carefully, waiting for him to explain what the hell just happened.

It took a few minutes of pacing while Will’s heart slammed behind his ribs, but he eventually turned to Will with an apologetic expression. “Richard and Stephanie Lagesse,” he said finally. “He was a business partner of my uncles until he retired last year. His wife, Stephanie, owns a family home in Milan. They must be visiting Bergamo.”

“What’s wrong with that?” Will asked softly.

“He knows what we are to one another,” Hannibal said defeatedly. “He *knows*, and in turn he will tell my uncle what he’s seen. What I’ve been doing while I’m here in Italy.”

“What would he do, Hannibal? Punish you? Disown you? For something that some random asshole thinks he saw?” Will asked in disbelief.

“That asshole was his most trusted financial advisor,” he sighed. “My uncle trusts him implicitly. Whatever happens, it’s too late to worry about it, now.”

“But you *are*,” Will said carefully, coming to Hannibal’s side to trail his fingers down to his wrist. “You are worried.”

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal blurted, face still red like he’d been caught fucking Will instead of simply holding him around his waist.

“No,” Will sighed. “*I’m* sorry. Do you… do you want me to catch a bus back to Crema? You want me to leave?”

“No,” he said fiercely, turning to grab Will and haul him against his body. He was crushed in a desperate embrace, much like the one he’d received the day before. “No, I don’t want you to leave.”

“Good,” Will sighed, wrapping his arms around Hannibal, too. “Good.”

They were both still a little drunk, even though the mood had changed drastically after their encounter. He gave Hannibal as much space as he could, though. He buried his nose in a book he’d brought with him, watching Hannibal work on his manuscript, even though they both knew he wasn’t actually working on it at all.

Will busied himself afterwards, heading into the bathroom to brush his teeth and wash his face before climbing into bed.

Alone.

Hannibal kept himself busy at the desk for a few more minutes, his eyes drifting over to Will occasionally before he abandoned his work to go do the same.

He climbed into bed carefully, keeping distance between he and Will's bodies like he was afraid to touch him. "You must think I'm so weak," Hannibal said lowly.

"I don't think that at all," Will promised him, reaching out to close the distance between them by touching the high arch of his cheekbone with his thumb. "I know that how I was raised is not like how other people are raised. I know that I've been lucky in that regard. I think you're brave for… for embracing who you are. At least with me."

"Only with you," Hannibal countered. He wiggled closer under the sheet, hauling Will against his body with a sigh. "You've no idea how tempting it is to just… leave with you. Go somewhere that no one will know us. Switzerland. The Netherlands. I don't care. We could beg for change on the side of the streets."

"We can't do that," Will chuckled. "I've got to go to college, and you've got to be a doctor. A good one."

"I hope so," Hannibal said wistfully.

Will went up on one elbow, looking down at him while touching his remarkable face with his fingertips. "I have… something I want to give you."

"Do you?" he asked with the first genuine smile he'd had since they bumped into Richard. Dick. His name was fitting, given the circumstances.

Will climbed from the bed, leaving the warm circle of Hannibal's arms to get his bag on the floor. The book was buried beneath his clothes and other books he'd brought, and he took it back to the bed almost reluctantly.

Hannibal looked curious as he took it from Will's fingers, reading the cover quickly before opening it. Hannibal's breath left him in a whoosh while he read what Will had wrote on the inside cover, and he looked up at Will with glassy eyes. "This is lovely," he said thickly. "Thank you."

Because of the lavender stuck in the book, it opened easily to the poem that Will had translated. Hannibal read that, too, and Will stood by the bed, waiting for him to look back up.

When he finally did, the tears in his eyes had spilled over, and he wiped at them with his fingertips. "This is… Will, I don't know what to say."

"I *love* you," Will said softly. "I can't let you leave without saying it to you, because that would haunt me for the rest of my life. I love you."

Hannibal pressed the drying lavender back between the pages, closing the book carefully so it was just as Will had put it. He set it aside then moved until he was sitting at the edge of the

bed before reaching out to hold Will's hand. His eyes smoldered up at Will, his lashes damp with tears. "I love you," he whispered. "I love you so fiercely, Will. I wish… I wish I could marry you. I wish I could bring you home with me and tell my family to fuck themselves. I am better for knowing you. For loving you."

Will's own tears worked free, and he climbed into Hannibal's lap, wrapping his arms around his neck. Hannibal held him closer still, his arms banded around Will's waist like steel. "Will," Will breathed, pressing a kiss to Hannibal's throat.

"Hannibal," he replied, threading his fingers through Will's curls to tug him down for a kiss.

The world was unfair in that they couldn't get married. How could a love like *this* not be celebrated simply because they were men? How could their love be *less* than everyone else's?

They'd never be able to take one another's last names, but they could give one another their first. They didn't have a lifetime together, but they had less than a week.

They needed to love each other for a lifetime in the span of five days.

He peppered Hannibal's face in kisses, wondering how many he was giving him. If they had a lifetime, there would at least be one a day. Three-hundred-and-sixty-five a year until they died. He was never going to accomplish that, so he crashed their mouths together and kissed him deeply, their tongues battling to claim and own one another.

If they had forever, he'd make love to Hannibal every single night until he couldn't do it anymore. Until their knees and hips were so bad that the most they could do was take out their dentures and suck one another off, if that were even possible.

He mourned the loss of every morning together. Of every evening they would never have to come home to one another.

Hannibal rolled them onto the bed, trailing kisses down his stomach while peeling his underwear off his legs. "Make love to me," Hannibal pleaded, eyes shining in the dim light of the lamp by their bed.

With his fingers buried inside of Hannibal, he tried to memorize the feel of him. How slick and hot he was while clamping around his fingers. He wanted to burn this moment into his skin so he wouldn't ever miss it. It would be a part of him, taken everywhere he would ever go.

He slid inside of Hannibal, and it felt like coming home. It was warm and inviting, soft kisses smeared across his jawline, then his shoulder. Every sigh got stored away in his Mind Palace, every brush of their fingers against one another's skin was tucked into a part of his mind where he could recall it at his leisure.

"Hannibal," his lover sighed into his ear.

"Will," he replied, licking the stubbled skin of his jawline while fucking into him slowly.

There wasn't an inch of space between them, which suited them just fine. Will wanted less space between them. He wanted to meld into his body and find peace alongside Hannibal's heart, safe in the space behind his ribs.

Instead, he buried himself deeper, pressing his hips flush against the back of Hannibal's thighs, grinding into him without retreating whatsoever. His lover made a wrecked noise, his fingers digging bruises into his backside as if he wanted to pull Will inside of himself, too.

They fell over the edge together, his seed buried deep inside of Hannibal where it should be while Hannibal's seed dried on his abdomen and chest. It felt like a waste, so Will licked him clean, taking Hannibal into his own body so that some part of him could be inside of Will at the same time. A perfect circle, each inside of one another. Almost like accepting the eucharist at church.

He did tell Hannibal he worshipped him, after all.

They fell asleep tangled together, their arms wrapped around one another's sweat-damp bodies. "Love you," he heard Hannibal whisper against his temple.

He thought he said it back, but sleep took him, and he couldn't be sure.

The next few days passed far more quickly than Will meant for them to. They went sight-seeing to a few churches in the area, picnicking in the plaza or surrounding hiking trails that led out towards the mountains.

A few hours a day had to be set aside for Hannibal to work on his manuscript, but Will didn't mind that so much, either. He knew The Iliad, and he felt familiar enough with the work to offer what little insights he felt he could.

Will laid in their bed, his head on Hannibal's leg while he scribbled furiously in his notebook that balanced on the other. "Patroclus wore Achilles' armor into battle," he noted with a laugh, reaching down to touch Hannibal's boxers that he had decided to wear.

"Is that what you're doing wearing my clothes?" Hannibal mused. "Preparing for battle?"

"Billowy isn't meant for war," Will giggled. "It's meant for love."

"I suppose those boxers are another conquest? Much like my red bathing suit?" Hannibal teased, ruffling his fingers through Will's curls.

"You'd suppose right. You're not getting these back."

"Fair enough," Hannibal laughed. "I have your bathing suit in my suitcase, too."

"No you don't!" Will laughed, vibrating the bed enough that Hannibal had to pause his furious scribbling. "Do you?"

“I do,” he chuckled, splaying one hand wide across Will’s bare chest, fingers tickling his ribs. “I also took the yellow bedsheet,” he admitted, blushing furiously.

“The wine stained one?” Will laughed.

“None other, yes,” Hannibal admitted, cheeks tinging rose-gold in embarrassment. “We made love until sunrise on that sheet. I wanted it, and… I stole it.”

“Mafalda will probably think it was thrown out,” Will shrugged.

Hannibal set his work aside, stretching out beside Will with his feet propped up on the headboard. “I can’t work with you, shirtless and giggling in my lap.”

“Should I leave?” Will laughed.

“You should stay,” Hannibal sighed. “I don’t want you out of my sight.”

Will rolled on top of him, and they didn’t climb out of bed again until morning.

Their last day together was dreaded. It felt like it came too soon. They didn’t get to do everything they wanted to while they were here, but Will couldn’t regret a single moment they’d been holed up in their hotel room.

Will was quiet most of the day, but then, so was Hannibal. They walked around in the touristy part of Bergamo, picking up a few postcards that had photos of the mountains and photos of the square that they visited daily. They bought two of each before heading back to the hotel with their purchases. “I want you to write me something on the back of each one,” Hannibal asked softly, setting out three postcards. “Anything. I’ll do the same with the duplicates and give them to you. The only thing is that we can’t read them until after I board the train tomorrow morning.”

Will’s throat felt clogged with tears, but he nodded while accepting a pen from Hannibal’s outstretched hand. Hannibal went to the bed with his postcards, leaving Will at the desk with his own.

The first postcard was of the mountains surrounding the city, and Will flipped it over to the blank side.

‘I fell asleep in your arms last night. The steady thrum of your heart against my ear. I feared falling asleep, as I didn’t want to lose a single moment with you. It was for no reason, because my dreams were filled with you, too. When I awoke, it was to you kissing my cheek, your arms still around me.
My only consolation is that I will dream of you. Often. Hopefully always.’

The second postcard was a picture of the Cappella Colleoni. A church that he and Hannibal had toured on one of their first mornings in Bergamo. He flipped it over.

‘Your hands on my skin. Mine on yours. Your lips against mine. Mine against yours. The feel of you, moving inside of me. The taste of you on my tongue. Your scent; coconut sunscreen, spicy cologne, and salty sweat. Your body is my temple, Hannibal. I worship at the altar of you.’

The third postcard was of the plaza at the center of the city, and Will flipped it over.

‘We sipped coffees here, your foot covering mine under the table. I wonder if you have any idea how much I love when you laugh like you did that morning, our toes battling it out where no one could see them. When I think of you, it’ll be just that; You, smiling and happy. The sun shining down as if it only shined for you alone. When you think of me, I hope it’s the same. I think it will be, because we are the same. I will love you, always.’

He swiped quickly at the tears that had accumulated on his cheeks, then gathered the postcards and moved to press them into Hannibal’s luggage, which was all packed and ready to go for the morning.

Hannibal was still writing, two postcards set aside while the third was filled with tight, small, script. When he finished, he went to Will’s luggage and put them in the zippered pouch, out of sight until after Hannibal left him.

“Should we get dinner?” Will asked softly.

Hannibal shook his head gravely, holding his hand out for Will to come to him at the edge of the bed. Will went to him, taking his hand as Hannibal pulled him close. “I feel on the verge of… I don’t know, a panic attack, maybe.”

Will straddled him, wrapping the tense man in his arms as tightly as he could. “I am right here,” Will whispered, then pressed a kiss against his cheek. “Right here.”

Hannibal held him tight, a shuddering rolling through his body. “I never expected you, Will. I didn’t… nothing could have prepared me for this.”

“People wait their whole lives for what we have,” Will agreed. “I am both unbelievably lucky and cursed to have found you at seventeen. My soulmate,” he breathed, kissing Hannibal’s cheek. “My best friend,” he kissed Hannibal’s temple. “My everything,” he sighed, pressing his mouth against Hannibal’s in a chaste kiss.

“Love you,” Hannibal gasped, threading his fingers through Will’s hair to drag him in for another kiss. “Love you, Love you.”

They took their time undressing one another. Every inch of skin was bared slowly, reverent kisses pressed as each bit of them was exposed. Hannibal pressed him back into the mattress, kissing him deep and slow. It felt like a first kiss; tentative and exploratory. It also felt like a last kiss; desperate and probing.

Will rolled onto his stomach at Hannibal’s command, rising onto his knees while his lover spread him and kissed the most intimate part of him. Strong fingers gripped his bottom,

keeping him spread wide while Hannibal licked and sucked at his entrance so devotedly it felt like his skin was about to burst into flames.

This is the last time he will ever do this, Will thought. This was what it felt like to know no one else would ever compare.

Hannibal ate at the core of him for what felt like hours, though he'd never demand anything more if this were all Hannibal wanted to give him. He wished it could go on forever, pause time from moving forward and bask in this moment until the sun fell from the sky and took them all along with it.

His skin felt chafed from Hannibal's stubbled jaw. His entrance felt wet and stretched open because his lover had buried his tongue as far inside of him as he could. Hannibal began working his fingers inside of him too, brushing that spot inside of him while licking and kissing around the spread of his fingers.

It didn't take much more than that. Will came with a gasp, rocking his hips back against Hannibal's face to grind on his mouth, wishing he were clamping down on his cock instead of his tongue.

Hannibal didn't disappoint him, though. He gripped Will's leg as though he weighed nothing, lifting him until his sweaty back was pressed into the sheets while Hannibal settled between his spread thighs. His lips were puffy and red from the attention he'd given to Will's body, his eyes dark as coal while he slicked his cock with lube before pressing in.

This. Will would miss this most of all, he thought. The times where Hannibal was buried inside of him to the hilt, no end to either of them, their flesh connected as though they were one. His pace was languid and deep, barely thrusting whatsoever. It was as though Hannibal merely wanted the connection too, to feel Will's body from the inside where he belonged.

Strong arms banded around his waist, lifting him from the bed with no effort. Will laced his arms around Hannibal's shoulders, moaning as his entire weight settled into Hannibal's lap. Hannibal sucked kisses against his throat, then his jaw, while Will rocked on Hannibal with little shifts of his hips, putting friction on the spot inside of himself that made him see stars.

They didn't rush. Their position didn't allow for it, and neither wanted to rush this, anyway. Hannibal held him tight, one large hand splayed across the small of Will's back for leverage, the other gripping Will's ass like a lifeline.

Their kisses were languorous and deep, mimicking their lovemaking in every way.

It somehow went on forever and ended too soon. Hannibal gasped while spilling deep inside Will's body, his kiss turning biting as he went over the edge.

He didn't wait a moment after he came before lowering Will back to the bed, trailing kisses down Will's body before swallowing his wet cock in his hot mouth. Will hissed, back arching while pressing his cock further down Hannibal's throat. It barely took a moment for how turned on he was, and he was spilling into Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal swallowed most of it, but Will still felt tense. He gripped his cock in his fist, jerking himself roughly while gliding the head of his cock over Hannibal's bottom lip, groaning low as a final spurt landed across Hannibal's lips.

He watched, enraptured, as Hannibal licked his come from his lips, using his fingers to press what he couldn't reach into his mouth. With a firm hand on Hannibal's bicep, he urged him up the bed, slamming their mouths together to taste himself on Hannibal's tongue.

Will hummed at the salty taste, licking his lips while flopping back against the pillows. Hannibal crawled over him, snuggling into his chest while caressing his skin with his fingertips. "I want to try," he said softly, making Will frown while he tugged his fingers through Hannibal's damp hair.

"Try what?" he wondered softly.

"You said it's only five years," he said, going up on his elbow to see Will's face, which he knew must look utterly shocked. "We can keep in touch… call one another often. You'll always be my friend, Will. I won't hold a grudge against you if you meet someone else. I won't be angry if you fall in love. I just… need you in my life. One way or another. I'll take anything you have to offer me."

"You can have all of me, Hannibal," he promised. "All of me. I wish I could be an adult about it and tell you that I won't mind if you fall in love with someone else, because I will mind. It'll kill me."

"It's expensive to call long distance," Hannibal sighed. "But I will try to call once a week. A few minutes here and there."

"I'm sure I can call you, too," Will chuckled. "My dad's phone bill is always through the roof with all his long-distance calls anyway."

"I feel… better, now. I felt strangled by how little time we had, and… I don't know, it feels like a relief to know I can call you whenever I need to and that you'll be here for me."

Will pressed a kiss to his cheek, holding his throat gently so he could feel his pulse against his fingertips. "I really do love you."

"I know you do," Hannibal grinned, smothering Will with his entire body. "Just as I hope you know that I love you, as well."

"I feel it," Will admitted softly, making Hannibal's eyes flash up at him in shock. "I can feel you, sometimes. I'm aware of how you feel about me."

"Good," Hannibal sighed, snuggling into him a bit more aggressively.

Will didn't mean to do it, but Hannibal was caressing his skin and holding him tight, and he fell asleep.

He awoke in the very early morning hours just before dawn to Hannibal straddling his thighs, pressing kisses down his chest. His cock was awake before he was, thick and heavy against

his abdomen. “I want you inside of me,” Hannibal breathed, Will’s pulse quickening. “I want to feel you when I get home. Will you do that for me?”

“Anything,” Will promised.

Hannibal wouldn’t even let Will prep him. Just lube before he pressed in, although he did so slowly and as gently as he possibly could.

He tried not to glance at the clock on the wall because every tick of it was one second less that he could spend with Hannibal. He was so distracted by that ticking fucking clock that he forgot to caress Hannibal’s cheekbone one more time.

He forgot to savor the feel of him when he was buried as deeply inside of him as he possibly could.

All he knew was that Hannibal rode him, giving him perfect access the clock on the wall behind his writhing body.

They had less than two hours together. Less than two hours, when it took forty-five minutes to get to the train station from here. They had no time at all, really. None.

“Where are you, beloved?” Hannibal gasped, rolling his hips against Will to get his attention. “Stay with me. Stay.”

They tumbled over the edge together, but Will barely felt it. Barely acknowledged it. The clock ticked on, and he held Hannibal tighter, trying to hold onto him in the only way that he could.

They showered together, and at least while they were in there, he couldn’t hear that fucking clock ticking.

Hannibal kissed him, slow and deep while washing his skin with gentle fingers. When Will went to do the same, Hannibal stilled his hands. “I want you inside of me,” he said thickly. “I want to bring a part of you home with me.”

They took too long in the shower, and it was a rush to get to the train station. Hannibal stopped at a vendor and bought a few bottled waters for his bag, as well as some fresh fruits. They hadn’t had dinner, and they had no time for breakfast, either.

They arrived at the train station with little more than a few minutes to spare before it arrived, neither speaking whatsoever as it rolled up to the platform. Despite his stomach being completely empty, he still felt like he would be sick.

There were too many people around them to kiss one another. Instead, Hannibal stared at him with glassy eyes while Will’s muscles jolted with anxiety. Hannibal grabbed his shoulders, hauling him in for a hug that went on and on, while Will felt too numb to feel it.

Eventually they had to part because Hannibal was the last one who hadn’t boarded the train, yet. He went to the stairs slowly, backing toward them with his eyes on Will alone. It took

every ounce of his self-restraint to not follow after him. Snatch him in his hands and hold him down while the train pulled away from them.

“Hannibal,” he said from the bottom step of the train, eyes like molten honey.

“Will,” he croaked, arms banding around himself to keep himself together.

His legs moved without his consent, taking him directly to Hannibal who grabbed his face regardless of who might be watching, and kissed him.

The kiss was rough and demanding, and it tasted of salt from their tears. It tasted like toothpaste from when they’d brushed their teeth that morning. *This is what it feels like to lose him*, Will thought, heart breaking as Hannibal’s fingers delved into his hair, ruffling the curls between his fingertips.

They had to part because the train let out a warning horn that they were taking off.

Hannibal licked his lips while backing into the train, the doors closing with finality.

He watched as the train left the station. He watched it until it rolled so far away that he couldn’t see it anymore.

Will collapsed to his knees in the abandoned station, folding himself against the pavement. He felt dizzy and nauseous, and he couldn’t seem to get his breathing back to normal. Hyperventilating, he thought frantically. There’s never a paper bag when you need it.

He was supposed to take a cab back to the villa by himself after Hannibal left. Right now, he couldn’t even imagine it.

He went to a payphone in the station and called his mother with numb fingers, wincing when Mafalda answered. “Mafalda?” he croaked. “I need… I need Mom or Dad. Please.”

His mother said she’d come get him, but it would be over an hour before she got here. His skin felt tight in his anxiety, and he folded himself up on the bench outside, holding his knees to his chest while counting his breaths.

His mother picked him up, and he tossed his backpack in the backseat before climbing in the front with her. He was finally somewhere private, and all his heartbreak poured out of him like a dam releasing a river.

He sobbed on the ride home, his mother carding her fingers through his hair occasionally. He couldn’t bring himself to look at her. Couldn’t bring himself to see her face as she no doubt realized that her son was in love with another man.

In truth, he didn’t care. In that moment he would have shouted it from the mountain tops if it meant that Hannibal would come back to him.

Hannibal would not be coming back to him, though. Every second that ticked by was another mile between them, stacking up until he was four-thousand miles away again in New York.

He was all cried out by the time they got back into Crema where his mother stopped off for cigarettes in the plaza. His eyes were swollen and sore, his lungs rattling with each breath he forced himself to pull into his body.

Suddenly there was a person lingering in the opened car window, and Will flinched when he realized it was Marzia. “Are you okay?” she asked softly.

“Okay,” he nodded, eyes dropping to her slender fingers where they held the car door.

“I just…” she sighed. “I forgive you, Will. We were friends longer than we were anything else, and… I don’t want to lose you because you… because…” Because Will was gay, he understood with a nod. She seemed thankful that she didn’t have to say it and smiled. “I do love you, you know. I’ll be here if… if you need someone to talk to. Any time.”

He climbed from the car and hugged her tight, his muscles shivering with exertion from crying. Exertion from the intensity of he and Hannibal’s lovemaking the night before. She held him tight, leaning away only to sweep his tears from his face. “You need me?” she asked, touching the swollen skin under his eyes with gentle fingertips.

He shook his head. “I…” he croaked. “I need some time. I feel like…” he couldn’t even get the words out, but she nodded as if she understood.

She pulled away from him, then gave him a small smile. “You know where to find me, yes?”

He nodded again, and she waved while walking back over to her friends that were at the café.

Being back at the villa was torture.

His room no longer felt like his room. It felt like… their room. Their room, where it would only ever be Will that slept in it. All of Hannibal’s things were gone, the closet filled again with Will’s clothes.

The bedsheets were changed. Clean, white, sheets that wouldn’t hold Hannibal’s scent in them anymore.

The bathroom had been given a deep cleaning, too. The tub was spotless. Fresh towels hung over the towel racks.

The room smelled clean and fresh. No hint of Hannibal’s clean sweat anywhere to be found.

He couldn’t be in this room, so he crept downstairs and outside. He went to heaven, realizing he couldn’t fucking sit here, either. It felt too quiet without Hannibal there. It no longer felt like heaven at all.

He avoided the gardens. He avoided the living room where Hannibal had rubbed his feet on the sofa. He went to his dad’s study, wincing when his father set aside his newspaper on the leather couch to pat the cushion next to him.

“So,” his dad said as he sat down cautiously on the sofa with him. “How was it? Did Hannibal have a nice trip?”

Will stared resolutely at the coffee table, fingers twisting in the ends of Billowy nervously. “I think so,” he shrugged.

There was a pause of silence, and he glanced over at his dad who was looking at Billowy with a gentle smile. “I hope you know how… special your friendship was.”

“Yes,” Will said carefully, anxiety rising at the turn of the conversation.

“You’re too smart not to know how very rare a relationship like yours was,” he went on.

“Hannibal is an intelligent man,” Will began, trying to deflect from the other emotions they clearly felt for one another, but his father was having none of it.

“Intelligent?” he repeated with a shake of his head. “He was more than intelligent. What you two had had everything and nothing to do with intelligence. He was good, and you were both lucky to have found each other, because you too are good.”

Will dipped his eyes down, twisting his thumb in the fabric of Billowy with a nonchalant shrug. “He was better than me,” he said softly.

“I’m sure Hannibal would say the same thing about you,” his father chuckled. “Which flatters the two of you.”

Will said nothing in response, and his father used the time to gather his ashtray and his pack of cigarettes, tapping one out of it while gathering up his lighter. “When you least expect it, Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot. Just remember, I am here. Right now, you may not want to feel anything. Perhaps you never wished to feel anything. And perhaps it’s not to me that you’ll want to speak about these things. But feel something you obviously did.”

His father lit his cigarette while tears formed again in Will’s eyes. His father knew. He wondered how long he’d known. “You had a beautiful friendship,” his father went on after a pull on his smoke. “Maybe more than a friendship. And I envy you. In my place, most parents would hope the whole thing goes away, to pray that their sons land on their feet. But I am not such a parent. In your place, if there is pain, nurse it. And if there is a flame, don’t snuff it out. Don’t be brutal with it. We rip out so much of ourselves to be cured of things faster, that we go bankrupt by the age of thirty and have less to offer each time we start with someone new. But to make yourself feel nothing so as not to feel anything - what a waste.”

All Will could think was that his father knew. His father knew about him. He knew about them, and he… was alright with it. All he could think in that moment was that Hannibal was right; he was very lucky to have the parents that he had. His father was one of a kind. “Have I spoken out of turn?” his father asked.

Will shook his head, swallowing thickly. “Then let me say one more thing. It will clear the air,” his father promised. “I may have come close, but I never had what you two had.

Something always held me back or stood in the way. How you live your life is your business. Remember, our hearts and our bodies are given to us only once. And before you know it, your heart is worn out, and, as for your body, there comes a point when no one looks at it, much less wants to come near it. Right now, there's sorrow. Pain. Don't kill it and with it the joy you've felt. We may never speak about this again. But I hope you'll never hold it against me that we did. I will have been a terrible father if, one day, you'd want to speak to me and felt that the door was shut, or not sufficiently open."

Silence descended between them, but only because Will was fighting off tears that he truly couldn't cry anymore. His eyes ached as much as his heart ached. "Does Mama know?"

His father flicked ash from his cigarette, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't think she does."

Later that night, he went up to… his room. His room, now.

He took his still-unpacked bag from the floor, taking his things from it absently. The three postcards were nestled in the front pouch, completely forgotten about.

He took them from the bag with shaking fingers, heart slamming in his chest as he moved to the desk to turn on the light there.

The first one was the postcard the plaza, and he turned it over, smiling at the tight, neat, script.

'The moment my eyes landed on you the day I arrived, I was lost. I had never seen anyone so beautiful in all my life. You were surly and rude, which Mafalda has told me is because you hated giving your room to your father's guests every summer. Your eyes. Your hair. Your skin. I craved you, Will. I had never craved another man like I craved you, but… in our case, I don't think gender matters. Our souls know one another, don't they? You are the other half of me. My body knew it before my heart knew it.'

He ran out of room, and Will swept the tears from his cheeks while reaching for the next one. The postcard of the mountains.

'You're sitting across from me right now, writing your own postcards to me. Billowy molds around your slender shoulders like a second skin, and all I want is to go to you. Press my nose into your curls and breathe you in. I crave you, Will. I want nothing more than your company. I want you happy and laughing. I want your moody silence when you're thoughtful. You're always thoughtful. I am better for having met you. I am better for knowing you. My every thought is saturated by you. When I dream, it is only of you. Even now, I am counting down the minutes until you come back to bed and wrap your arms around me. I love you, Will. I love you, love you, love-'

He ran out of room again, and Will laughed through his sniffling sobs, pressing his eyes to clear the tears so he could read. The last one was the postcard of the church, and he took it with shaking fingers.

‘Tomorrow night at this time, I’ll be on a plane. I can’t even think of it without feeling like my heart is crumbling in my chest. I wish I would have thought to make a cassette of you playing the piano. I wish we would have gotten a camera to take photos together. I wish I had something more from you to bring home with me than memories and sketches, but… it’s all I will have. I wish I could take you with me. I wish I could marry you. I wish my every moment from now on was filled with nothing but your smiling face. You own my heart, Will. You are inside of me, burrowed into my very blood cells. I breathe for you alone. Blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance. You are fire and warmth. If I saw you every day, forever, I would remember this time. The way you look right now, staring down at me while waiting for me to finish writing because you want my arms around you again. I love you, Will. Now and always.’

He read them and reread them until his eyes burned, etching the words into his very soul. He wanted to be able to recite them by heart, know them as his own words just as they were Hannibal’s.

After a few hours, he returned to his half-unpacked bag, withdrawing his dirty clothes, and organizing his toiletries. A silver bracelet fell from the bag, clanking against the floor. He frowned, chasing the thing down as it rolled under his bed.

It was a silver cuff bracelet. It made a ‘C’ shape, opened on the side that would sit against his wrist. Will tipped it into the light, his mouth falling open as he read the inscription that would rest against his skin.

‘A part of my soul has loved you since the beginning of time. Our atoms are from the same star.’

He pressed it onto his wrist, tightening the metal so it stayed snug against his skin where it would stay for the remainder of his life.

Hannibal called in the early morning the next day, and Will picked up the phone before anyone else could. “*Pronto*,” he breathed.

“Will,” Hannibal sighed. He sounded utterly exhausted. “I miss you.”

“I miss you, too,” Will said, biting his lip while touching the silver cuff on his wrist. “I got your present.”

“Did you,” Hannibal chuckled. “Do you like it?”

“I love it,” Will promised. “I’m wearing it right now.”

“Left or right?”

“Left,” Will smiled. “The hand you’d put a ring on me if you could.”

“I can still smell you on my clothes,” Hannibal whispered. “I can still feel you. God, I hate this. I hate being here. The city stinks. There’s a firetruck stuck on the street with traffic around it. Can you hear it?”

“I can,” Will admitted, listening to the violent whirr of its siren along with the frantic horns blaring from annoyed cars around it.

“I miss being there,” he went on. “I miss chamomile bedsheets and lavender breezes. I miss your smile. I miss your touch. Will, I feel like… I’m falling apart.”

“Will,” he breathed, closing his eyes. “Will, Will,” he chanted.

“Hannibal,” he replied, voice tight and anxious over the line. “Hannibal, Hannibal.”

“You’re me,” he said softly, “and I am you. That means you’re here. You’re standing in the living room, cool marble floors against your bare feet. You feel it?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said, voice a little lighter than it was a moment ago.

“You’re about to go outside for a four-minute egg that Mafalda will crack open for you, because she loves you dearly,” he smiled. “The sun hasn’t crested over the treetops, yet. It’s hot and humid, heat bugs and birds singing. You’ll have breakfast, then head to heaven for a swim. With me,” he added.

“With you,” he agreed.

“I’ll take Billowy off,” Will went on, whispering to keep his voice low. “So I’ll be only in your red bathing suit.”

“Will,” he gasped over the line. It sounded like he was crying. “I miss you.”

“I know,” Will said thickly. “I’m with you, though. Now. Always. Our stars will always be the same, Hannibal.”

“Put your hand over your heart,” Hannibal pleaded, and Will immediately pressed his hand under Billowy, resting his palm against his chest. “Did you?” he asked.

“My hand is on my heart,” Will promised. “Is yours?”

“It is,” he sighed. “You think our hearts are beating in time with one another? Synced and aligned no matter how far apart we are?”

“Yes,” he said, closing his eyes. His heartbeat thrummed against his palm, and in that moment, it was Hannibal’s heart he was feeling. “It’s like you’re here with me.”

“My heart is always there with you,” he whispered. There was the distinct sound of a doorbell ringing, and Hannibal sighed. “I have to go, beloved. My uncle said he needed to speak with me.”

“I love you,” He pressed his hand against his heart a little harder.

“As I love you,” he whispered. “Talk to you soon.”

The line went dead, and it felt like Will did, too.

He didn’t call. He didn’t write. Will wrote him a few times, talking about school once it started again, and talking about how he might be applying to George Washington University for the springtime.

He sent four letters and no response ever came.

He withdrew from friends and his family, his heart aching and his stomach in knots. Weeks turned into months without a word. Without a call.

Without any contact whatsoever.

He called Hannibal twice, each time his answering machine picked up. “Please call me,” Will pleaded. “Please. Just… your voice. You don’t even have to speak. Hannibal, please.”

He never called back.

Christmas rolled around, and he resented the three weeks he had off from school before the spring semester began. The phone rang the first week of January, and Will answered it because his parents were busy in the study. “*Pronto*,” he greeted.

“Will,” a familiar voice rumbled.

Will sat down heavily at the chair by the phone, his heart slamming behind his ribs. “Hannibal.”

“How are you?”

Dead inside, Will thought. “Fine. You?”

“Good,” he cleared his throat. “Good. I’m actually calling because I have… good news.”

“You got your doctorate?” Will asked numbly.

“Yes,” he said, but his tone implied that wasn’t all.

“Congratulations,” Will said, forcing a smile into his voice.

“Thank you,” came the stiff response. “That’s not all, though.”

“What?” Will tried to joke. “You getting married?”

The silence over the line was deafening, and Will folded in on himself. His hands shook as he held the phone against his face, his bottom lip quivering. “I might be getting married this spring,” Hannibal said after a beat. “Is that… alright?”

Will said nothing. He wasn't even sure he could speak in that moment. He was saved from responding by his parents picking up the line in the study, exclaiming their joy over Hannibal's call with genuine happiness in their voices. He listened as Hannibal told them he was a doctor, now. And that he was getting married.

It was like listening to the news from outside his own body. "Okay, okay," his mother laughed. "We miss you, Hannibal! I'll let you catch up with Will."

"Miss you, too," he replied.

He heard the phone click on their end, and silence descended once again. "I miss you," Will blurted.

"I miss you, too," Hannibal promised immediately. Will didn't believe him for a moment. Not a fucking moment.

"My parents… they know about us," Will said softly.

"I figured as much," he replied.

"How?"

"From the way your father spoke - he made me feel like a member of the family - almost like a son-in-law. You're lucky. My uncle would have carted me off to a correctional facility."

"Will," Will said softly, eyes closed. "Will, Will," he repeated, voice tight with longing.

"Hannibal," he sighed. "I remember everything. Everything."

Will closed his eyes, listening to his breathing over the line.

It would be the last time they'd speak for the next eleven years.

Chapter End Notes

Hello darling readers.

I realize this feels MOROSE, and I know a lot of you are probably hating his ass to pieces right now. The next update won't be until probably the 23rd or 24th. =\ I will be out of state.

Stick with me, darlings. We're flashing forward to 1994 next update!

EDIT: YES that bracelet is just like the one Hugh wears. haha. What can I say, I love the way it looks on his slender wrist. =]

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I'M BACK FROM VACATION!

It was amazing while we were in California. It was less amazing when we had canceled flights because of a hurricane when we were coming home. It's good to be back, though.

Shorter-ish chapter this time, because the next one is a big one. <3333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wolf Trap, Virginia
1994

He never expected to see Hannibal again. There was a part of him that hated himself for reacting the way he did, and another part that congratulated himself for being so callous.

Why wasn't he in New York where he belonged? Why was he in Baltimore? Will didn't know for certain, but he suspected it had to do with his wife's practice.

He got *completely* fucking drunk when he got home. Enough so that he ignored the phone calls from Jack, who was leaving messages on his answering machine. "Will," he sighed. "Just got a call from Dr. Petersen's office. He said you didn't show up for your appointment. You *will not* be cleared for field work until you talk to somebody, Will. Call me when you get this."

The answering machine beeped, heading into the next message. "Will," Alana said softly. "You didn't show for your appointment, and that's not like you. I'm worried, and… if I don't hear from you, I'll drive to your house. *Don't* make me drive to your house, please."

He cringed at that one, and he picked up the phone to dial her number. She answered on the first ring. "I was worried," she breathed. "Did something happen?"

"I ran into someone," Will slurred, wiping the tears from his face. "Someone I never expected to see again in my life."

"Who?" she asked softly.

“A mistake,” Will sniffled. “A huge mistake that I’ve been paying for every day for the last eleven years.”

“You’re drunk,” she realized.

“Oh *yeah*,” he laughed, sweeping tears from his cheeks. “I thought I was stronger than this. I thought I was over it, but I’ll *never* be over it. Do you know… Do you know, I’ve never really dated anyone since… since them?”

“I don’t think you’d normally tell me any of this,” she sighed. “But I am going to listen because I think you need someone to listen to you.”

“I have lived my life feeling this… this sense of *regret*,” he mumbled while toying with the silver bracelet on his left wrist. “Like I was missing something important. This… collapsed feeling under my skin that I didn’t really experience things as they were happening. This… fallen heart feeling that I rushed through moments where I should have slowed down and paid attention. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

She hummed. “When good things are happening around you, and you feel like you’re not absorbing them to the best of your ability. I know the feeling,” she agreed softly.

“Get used to it,” Will blurted, laughing ruefully. “That’s what you have to look forward to for your whole life. Grasping on to tiny moments that are smoke and wind. You can’t hold onto anything good, Alana.”

“Put whatever bottle you have in your hand down, Will,” she muttered. “You have a class to teach at nine, and… to be perfectly frank, you’re scaring me.”

He ruffled Winston’s ears, who’d come over to place his soft head in Will’s lap as though he knew Will was upset. “You can only hold a smile for so long,” he sighed. “After that, it’s just teeth. Good night Alana.”

“Will?” she said softly.

“Yeah?”

“Are you alright?”

“Fine,” he promised weakly. “Sorry I bailed on dinner with you.”

“Will you still come to the dinner party with me this Saturday?” she asked hopefully.

Will blinked tiredly, resting his head against the back of his sofa. “What dinner party was that?”

“At a colleague of mine’s home,” she sighed. “I asked you last week and you said yes, and I already told him that I had a plus one.”

“Then yes,” Will shrugged, though she couldn’t see it. “When you say colleague…”

“A therapist friend of mine,” she laughed. “Who is a good guy and won’t burrow into your brain. I promised you that.”

“A little weird to go to some guy’s house that I don’t even know,” Will mumbled.

“There are fifty people going,” Alana chuckled. “It won’t be weird at all. A lot of them are plus ones.”

“Maybe you should ask someone else?” he wondered. “I’m not… Alana, I’m not dating material.”

“I can see that,” she said drolly. “But I can also see that you’re a good man, and that you’re shy. There’s no reason why we can’t be friends.”

“You want to be my friend,” he repeated, scowling down at Winston as if asking him for answers.

“I think we already are,” she said, and it sounded like she was smiling. “Unless you’re not planning to forgive me for suggesting that you speak with someone. Professionally.”

“I’m not mad at you,” he sighed exhaustedly. “Disappointed, maybe.”

“Alright *dad*,” she laughed. “I’m going to take a raincheck on this guilt trip. I care about you, and I want you to have a glass of water before going to bed. Will you do that?”

“Yes *mom*,” he countered with a laugh. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Will. See you tomorrow.”

He was completely hungover the next day. He woke up and popped a few aspirin, moving through his morning routine almost perfunctorily. He didn’t even bother with a button-down shirt, just his blue-gray Henley and gray khakis.

Still, he took care of his dogs and got out the door before he usually did, getting to work not only on time, but with enough time to spare to grab himself a coffee from a Dunkin Donuts.

Their coffee was good, but nothing compared to the little café by the villa in Italy.

His classes went by quickly, and he found his mood to be a little better than it was the night before.

Jack stopped in at lunchtime, and he apologized for missing his appointment while promising that he would keep the next one, which happened to be later that afternoon.

He worried for the remainder of the day. What if he ran into Hannibal again in the building? What if he saw the two of them together? What if he didn’t see Hannibal at all? He couldn’t decide which outcome was worse, really.

All his worrying was for nothing at all, as he didn't run into a soul when he made his way up to Dr. Petersen's office.

His first appointment with the man went well. He was a good psychiatrist, and he didn't pry whatsoever. Will liked that about him, and he found himself saying more than he usually did when he was forced to go to a professional following an… incident.

It wasn't often, but even twice a year was enough. The last time, he'd gotten a nosebleed so severe that Jack had whisked him away to the hospital for it. His work stressed him out, and he was the rare lucky human being that experienced nosebleeds when stressed.

The doctors didn't believe him when he told them that it happens with stress, and they'd kept him for two days while running every test under the sun. They tested him for AIDS and brain tumors, and anything else they could think of.

Nothing came up. All the testing stressed him out enough that he had a nosebleed again on the third day he was admitted, and they considered a psychiatric hold on him until Alana rescued him with a few well-placed signatures.

She had saved him a few times, now. So he definitely owed her at least that stupid dinner party he said he'd go to with her.

After his appointment, he made his way to the elevators while trying to shove next week's appointment reminder card into his wallet. He was distracted, so he didn't realize he'd climbed into the elevator with someone else until they spoke.

"You're terribly familiar," a cool voice said from his side.

He turned and found a beautiful, blonde, woman appraising him from head to toe. She focused on his face, her head tipping as if trying to place where she knew him from. "Sorry," he said softly. "We most definitely don't know one another." He'd remember her. She was… memorable.

"I do know you, though," she said with narrowed eyes. "Is it rude to ask you your name?"

"Not at all," Will smiled. "Will Graham," he said, offering his hand for a shake.

Her eyes widened, her mouth falling open in shock. She must be one that read Tattle Crime Magazine now and again. "My mistake," she said breathlessly. "I only knew your face when you were younger. Much, much, younger. He sketched you well."

Will's blood turned to ice in his veins as the elevator doors opened and closed. "I'm sorry?"

"Bedelia du Maurier," she said, accepting his outstretched hand for the shake he'd offered. "Nice to finally meet you."

"Is it?" he asked numbly. She was a beauty. A real, honest-to-God, beauty. All this time, he'd never had a face for her, and now that he did, he understood why Hannibal chose her over

him. She was elegant and stunningly gorgeous. Petite and clearly well-educated.

“Yes,” she said softly. Breathily. Even the way she spoke was hypnotizing. “I’ve often wondered over the boy who owned Hannibal’s heart. His sketches of you were flawless, but in person, you’re even more beautiful than I imagined.”

“Doctor du Maurier,” he blurted, blushing fiercely. He had no idea what Hannibal had told her about him, but the fact that she’d seen the sketches was more than enough.

“Bedelia,” she offered with a hesitant smile. “Let’s not be so formal, shall we?”

“What happened between he and I was over a decade ago,” Will explained. “I haven’t spoken to him since. Not *once*. Nothing happened between us after you were married.”

“I never accused you of such a thing,” she stated. “Not that infidelity is beyond either of us.”

That was too much information to handle, and he pressed the button for the doors to open with a sharp stab of his finger. “It was nice to finally meet you,” he said, stabbing the button frantically as the doors opened at a glacial pace. “Take care now.”

He didn’t stick around to see her face before he took off, practically jogging out of the lobby to his Volvo. He’d never wanted to meet her. He’d never wanted a face to go with the name. Not that Hannibal had offered so much as a photo of her to Will or his family, but still. He could picture her in his head how he chose to, and how he chose to see her in his head was as a compromise. Something no one would marry unless obligation proved it necessary.

It turned out that *Will* was the compromise that summer. Hannibal fucked around with a teenager, experimenting with his sexuality where it wouldn’t offend anyone he knew, then went home to the most beautiful woman on the planet.

Why did Bedelia say she wondered over the boy who owned her husband’s heart? She knew about him and that… didn’t fit with the idea that Hannibal had forgotten about him over all this time.

It didn’t mean anything, though. Maybe she was flipping through his sketchbooks when he got back and found all the sketches that Hannibal did of him. Maybe she asked about him, and he shrugged and said, ‘When in Rome,’ with a little laugh.

He couldn’t imagine Hannibal being so callous. The man he bumped into the other day… he didn’t seem callous. He seemed… heartbroken. Not that Will cared how he felt. He’d suffered because of Hannibal’s actions, too.

The rest of the week dragged by. He wasn’t allowed out on field work until Dr. Petersen cleared him, which meant he had a lot of free time on his hands. He filled it well, heading to his stream to fish, then spending evenings at his piano with his dogs around him.

He’d been working on Liszt, *La Campanella*, for months, now. It was a difficult piece. Very, very, difficult. After practicing for the better part of a year, first at a slow pace as he learned

the music, then quicker and quicker, he now knew it mostly by heart.

His parents wanted him to go to college for music, and he didn't. He pursued his own career that he'd wanted, and… there was some regret in him for that, now. He could be playing in concert halls in front of thousands of people.

Instead, he played on his dingy upright that he got in a want ad with his only audience being his dogs. Most people had no idea how well he could play, and it felt like a waste. He found peace here in his evenings, taking his aggression out on the piano until his fingers ached.

Friday night, his mother called as she usually did. "How is my darling boy?" she asked, and he heard the tell-tale strike of a match as she lit a cigarette.

"Fine," Will shrugged, then closed his eyes. He didn't lie to his parents. Not even as he'd gotten older. "Not fine. I… I bumped into Hannibal here at the beginning of the week."

"Did you?" she asked, her smile evident in her voice. "How is he?"

"Don't really know," Will admitted. "I… I ran away, Mama. I ran the hell away from him."

"And you regret running?" she wondered.

"Will!" his father bellowed after picking up another receiver in another room. "We miss you!"

"He saw Hannibal," his mother said.

"Did he? In Quantico?"

"I don't know where," she sighed. "Where did you see him?"

This… was a touchy thing to navigate. He didn't like his parents to know that the things he saw bothered him like they did, so in this, he withheld the truth. "Just on the street," he said. "In Baltimore. Literally slammed right into him because I was late for an appointment."

"How is he?" his father wondered, making his mother sigh again.

"He doesn't know," she said fiercely. "He avoided speaking to him."

"Oh Will," his father sighed. "You told me that if you ever saw him again, you'd say everything you felt."

"Well," Will said defensively. "I did say what I felt in that moment. He told me he read my monograph, and I… I said, 'fuck you.'"

"Will," his dad said miserably, while his mother made a wounded noise. "You can't hate him for moving on with his life. You can't hate him when you so clearly still love him."

"I have to go," he blurted suddenly. "Sorry, but… I'm late for… a date."

“Oh!” his mother shrilled. “With whom? That Alana woman?”

“Sure,” Will sighed. “Talk to you both soon. Love you so much.”

“As we love you, Caro,” his mother replied.

“Will,” his dad said after his mother dropped her receiver with a click. He heard a tell-tale cough rattle from his father’s throat, making him even more worried. “Life won’t keep giving you chances. It’s better not to burn them down when they present themselves.”

“He’s married,” Will said glumly, petting Buster who’d crawled into his lap. “He’s been married for a decade. He’s probably got kids and who knows what. A dog. A picket fence. There is no chance, Dad. None. I’m learning that the person you love and the person who loves you are never, ever, the same person.”

“Your pessimism,” his dad grumbled through another cough. “I’ve never heard it from you so much as since you’ve moved there. It doesn’t make you happy, Will. I can hear it in your voice, I can hear it in what you tell us of your life. We need help with the orchard since Anchise passed and Mafalda retired. We could use you back home, Will.”

“My home is here,” he said defeatedly. “I can’t just… walk away. I can’t.”

“You can,” his father assured him. “Life is nothing but a series of choices that dictate your future. Nothing is stone. You can change your mind about something. You’ve always made a decision and stood by it as though there were no other choice.”

“I’m coming for Christmas break,” Will promised. “A few more months and you’ll have me for three weeks.”

“I look forward to it,” his father sighed. “Will? Take care of yourself, please. I can’t tell you how much I worry for you.”

“I’m fine,” he lied. Again. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired,” he admitted, and it sounded like it was the absolute truth. “Cough keeps me up at night, lately.”

“When is the appointment with the specialist?”

“Two weeks from now,” his dad wheezed. “Your mother went to the library and looked up everything she could on Legionella.”

Will laughed. “Of course, she did. Maybe it’s just a cold,” he offered, though he seriously doubted it. His father’s cough had gotten more and more aggressive over the last few months. His doctor’s office in Lombardy didn’t have an x-ray, so he had to go to a specialist in Milan for more tests. Will worried about cancer, as his father and mother smoked like chimneys. “You still smoking?”

“No?” his father laughed, coughing and sputtering the whole time.

“Dad,” he sighed. “They’re killing you. It’s not funny at all.”

“Only one with my coffee and one after dinner,” he promised. “Nothing like I used to do.”

“Love you, Dad. Please take care of yourself, too.”

“I love you, Tesoro.”

He got off the phone, then resumed practicing his piano for no one at all.

Alana had told him to get dressed up for this dinner thing, so he wore his best black suit and a silvery-blue button-down. He opted not to wear a tie because he hated them, choosing instead to leave the top two buttons opened by his throat in an effort to look casual.

He took his time after his shower, parting his hair to the side and curling his curls around his fingers, trying his best to make it look like he just… looked like this. It was the only option he had because he didn’t own hair products aside from his shampoo and conditioner.

After trying to trim down the stubble on his face, he gave up and just shaved clean. He looked younger, but he preferred a bit of stubble. He knew most people didn’t, though.

He picked up Alana at her house in Baltimore, and she looked absolutely lovely in a royal blue dress that fit and flared at her hips. She was a vision, and she whistled when she saw him. “You clean up very well,” she blushed.

“As do you,” he laughed. “I’m really spoiled to take such a beautiful woman out on a not-date.”

“About that,” she said, biting her lip as she climbed into his car. He went to the driver’s seat and waited for her to continue. “The host… he’s… recently divorced. I’ve kind of… had a *thing* for him for a few years, now. Would you be… offended if I let him know subtly tonight that you and I are only friends?”

“Not at all,” Will chuckled. It wasn’t a lie, either. His heart had always belonged to someone else, and if Alana could find someone who loved her entirely, then she deserved that. “Go for it.”

“You’re…” she struggled, flapping her hands uselessly. “Amazing. Thank you.”

“Nothing to thank me for,” he shrugged. “Where am I going?”

“Two blocks that way,” she pointed. “Then we’re going through three lights, hang left. He lives at the bottom of the cul de sac.”

It was a really, really, nice neighborhood. Will cringed while driving down the street, mansions on either side of him rising up like ancient castles. They pulled up into a long driveway that was already full of cars, and he went around to get her car door for her. “Nothing to be nervous about,” Alana promised him, taking his arm while they went to the

front door. “He’s a good man. His wealth is not… I don’t know, it’s not important to him. You’ll see.”

He could hear the party going on the other side of the door, and he shifted his feet anxiously after she rang the doorbell. The door was swung open by wait staff, who took their coats and hung them in the foyer.

The house was tasteful, yet opulent. Alana greeted a few people she knew as they walked in, introducing Will along the way. They wound up in the large living area where they accepted glasses of wine from the staff, people conversing around them in little clicks. He didn’t know anyone here, which was kind of a blessing. He could blend in and be ignored completely.

There were bookshelves along one wall as high as the fifteen-foot ceiling, a rolling ladder tucked against the wall where expensive artwork was displayed under fancy lighting. He roamed the bookcases quietly while Alana socialized, following along the far wall to see what artwork there was.

There was a beautiful Steinway grand piano in the corner of the room. A piano that large should make any room it was in feel small, but in this house, it barely took up space at all. The artwork over his head caught his eye. There were very, very, expensive pieces and some that clearly held sentimental value for their host.

His heart stopped when he noticed it. Three postcards wedged between two pieces of glass. It was done in a way that if their host wanted to, he could take the postcards down and read what was written on the back.

Will didn’t need to do that. He *knew* what was written there.

He backed away from the wall slowly, moving to Alana with his heart in his throat. “I have to go,” he said to her numbly. “I’m sorry, Alana.”

“Why?” she asked, moving away from the group she’d been conversing with. “Why? Will, come on. Stay for me.”

“Can you catch a ride with someone?” he wondered, still backing away towards the foyer. “Please?”

She sighed, then nodded. “I can catch a ride. You’re disappointing me right now, just so you know.”

“I’ll make it up to you,” he promised. “See you soon.”

He dashed toward the foyer, snatching his peacoat from the hook as quickly as he could. Before he could get the door opened, a voice called from behind him. “Will?”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for how it ended! Next chapter goes up soon!

ALSO I came back from vacation and I am SHOCKED by how many comments I've gotten on my stories in a week?! I will try and respond to them all. Thank you, guys. I love you all.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Will?"

He froze. His heart slammed behind his ribs as he turned to find Hannibal standing there in all his glory. His eyes were wide in shock, and his body language looked like he wanted to reach out and touch Will but was fighting himself about it. "I didn't *know*," Will blurted. "Alana asked me to come to a friend's dinner party, but I didn't ask who. I wouldn't have come. I'm leaving. I'm not going to… to *ruin* it for you."

A firm hand pressed the door closed from behind him just as he was about to run off into the night. He felt Hannibal lean into him, could feel the buzzing electricity between them as Hannibal not-so-discretely inhaled at his nape. Will turned around abruptly, eyes blazing up at Hannibal who still hadn't stepped away from him. "Did you just *smell* me?"

Hannibal didn't even look embarrassed about it. "You still use the same shampoo. After all this time."

"Mafalda sends me care packages," Will blurted nervously. "My favorite soaps and shampoos."

"How is she?" Hannibal asked, still not letting the door go or stepping away. Will felt invaded by him, his nose full of his spicy cologne and clean aftershave.

"Fine," Will said thickly. "Retired."

"Your parents?" he asked.

"Also fine," he spat, turning his face away to stare at the woodgrain on the foyer walls.

"Everyone is *fine* then," Hannibal said cheekily, making Will glare up at him again.

"I want to leave," Will told him fiercely. "Let me leave, Hannibal."

"Please," he said softly, eyes turning softer in their pleading. "Stay, Will. Stay."

He didn't want to run into Bedelia, but… then he remembered what Alana had said about their host on the drive here. "You're divorced?"

"It was finalized earlier this week," Hannibal agreed. "Though we've been separated for two years."

"Sorry to hear that," Will said, voice utterly devoid of emotion.

“I’m not,” Hannibal sighed. “It was… a mistake. One that was forced upon us whether we wanted it or not.”

“You never reached out,” Will said accusingly. “Not once. Not even after you were separated.”

“I spoke to your father shortly after we separated,” Hannibal said softly. “I asked about you, but… he told me that I needed to speak to you myself. I tried, Will. I picked up the phone and dialed half your number before hanging up. I’ve done that for… about two years. Since I spoke with your father.”

“Coward,” Will spat bitterly, though his mind was preoccupied by Hannibal’s admission. His father never told him that Hannibal had reached out. As far as he knew, the last time Hannibal had spoken to his father had been eleven years ago. He wondered why his father kept it from him. “My father never told me,” he admitted under his breath.

“I asked him to give me time,” Hannibal admitted, though he looked contrite. “I told him that I wanted to speak to you on my own terms, and he promised he would allow me that. Don’t be angry with him. He was trying to do the right thing.”

“I just don’t understand why you waited nine years to reach out to him in the first place.”

“My uncle died two years ago,” Hannibal said, though Will had no idea what it had to do with anything.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Not a loss,” Hannibal said sharply. “A ticket to freedom.”

The comment confused Will completely, and he said nothing while staring at the familiar lines of Hannibal’s face. His cheekbones seemed more prominent than ever. His eyes were still that undefinable color between mahogany and honey. He was still the most beautiful man that Will had ever seen, even if he was a liar and a coward. “Please stay,” Hannibal pleaded. “I have… so much to tell you. So much to confess to you. I have no right to ask, but… if you give me a chance to tell you, then maybe some of the hostility between us could dissipate. I’m only asking for a few minutes of your time when everyone else leaves.”

Will sagged against the door, watching absently as wait staff and guests bustled around behind them. “I brought Alana here,” he said softly. “It’s rude to tell her to catch her own ride back home.”

“How was she getting home with you sneaking out the door, I wonder?”

“Dick,” Will mumbled, making Hannibal laugh. “You’ll get fifteen minutes. That’s it.”

“More than I deserve,” Hannibal said, smiling gently. “Thank you, beloved.”

“*Don’t*,” Will said softly. “Don’t call me that.”

“Forgive me,” Hannibal sighed. “I forget myself. Can I take your coat?”

Will handed it off, their fingers brushing briefly as the coat exchanged hands. That familiar buzzing sensation still existed, and Will shook his fingers out just as Hannibal smiled.

For the most part, Hannibal steered clear of him throughout dinner. The meal was incredible. Will had never been anywhere that served the sheer volume of courses that Hannibal served, all delicious and perfectly complimentary to one another. Alana sat by his side at the dinner table that felt more like a castle banquet table, and she nudged his shoulder. “Thanks for staying.”

“I’m not used to this many people,” Will deflected. “Sorry I tried to bail on you.”

“I haven’t even spoken to Hannibal, really,” she admitted miserably. “Can’t seem to make a move.”

Will had forgotten that she wanted to announce her interest with their host. His stomach flip-flopped, his shoulders slumping. “Try after dinner,” he suggested weakly.

Once dinner was over, they milled back into the living area with glasses of brandy in their hands. Hannibal came to he and Alana immediately, a beaming smile on his face. “How was dinner?”

“Delicious,” Will admitted. “You’re still a good cook.”

Alana’s eyes widened, and she glanced between them in surprise. “Do you both know one another?”

“He stayed with my family in Italy eleven years ago,” Will told her. “While working on his manuscript as a doctoral student.”

“No kidding!” Alana laughed. “How long did you stay with Will’s family?”

“Six weeks,” Hannibal said softly, looking pointedly at Will who stared down at his drink.

“Six weeks in Italy,” she sighed. “What a chore that must have been. So you met Will when he was… what? Sixteen?”

“Seventeen,” Hannibal said immediately, a blush staining high on his cheeks.

“What was he like?” she asked.

“Fiercely intelligent, funny, quiet. He liked to read, fish, and go swimming. He played the piano beautifully. Will was very gifted as a musician.”

This time Will blushed, and he tipped his face down to hide it.

“Really!” she laughed. “There’s a piano over there. I didn’t even *know* you could play,” she said to Will with a pout.

“I own a piano,” Will grimaced.

“It’s old as the moon,” Alana countered. “I didn’t even know if it was in tune, and I’ve never seen you play it. Play us something!”

“I don’t,”

“Play *me* something,” Hannibal said softly, eyes pleading.

Will sighed, moving through guests to sit at the piano with a flourish. He shrugged off his blazer, laying it on the side of the bench by his hip. He took his time unbuttoning his shirtsleeves, rolling them up his forearms. The instrument was absolutely stunning, and he tried to ignore how the guests stopped speaking or drinking as he sat down. Hannibal and Alana had crept closer, and he paused while staring at Hannibal’s face.

He looked… on the verge of tears while staring down at Will’s hands. Will frowned, glancing down at himself when he realized…

The bracelet was on full display. He’d never taken it off aside from when he cleaned it or when circumstances demanded him to. Otherwise, it always stayed on his left wrist. There was a time where he considered not wearing it anymore, as he’d been certain he never meant anything to Hannibal anyway.

He wore it because even if Hannibal never loved him, he certainly loved Hannibal. On his end, the love was as real as it could be.

He closed his eyes, hiding the distractions from himself, and played.

La Campanella was the only thing he could think of playing, as it was a piece he’d been practicing for six months now. He knew it mostly by heart, and the few bits that he was uncertain about were lost among the parts he knew. He played furiously, letting his hands move the way they knew how, pounding his frustration into the piece with every fiber of his being.

The people around him drifted away, the only thing that stayed was himself and the keys beneath his fingers. The instrument sang for him, echoing in the room the way a grand piano was meant to.

The piece came to a close, and Will’s breathing was erratic with the effort he’d made as his eyes lifted up to find the stunned expressions on everyone’s faces. People began clapping, which made Will blush furiously. “That was *incredible*,” Alana breathed. “Will, my God! What the hell are you doing teaching Criminal Psych to students when you can play like that?”

“I made a few mistakes,” Will blurted, though his fingers immediately began playing Bach absently to soothe himself. “I’m still practicing that piece.”

He chanced a glance at Hannibal and immediately had to look away. The look of sheer adoration on his shining eyes was too much for Will to deal with. “What else can Will do?”

she asked Hannibal, laughing until she saw the expression on Hannibal's face as he stared at Will alone.

Silence descended between them, and Alana cleared her throat awkwardly. "Who knew my *friend* could play like that?" she wondered, putting emphasis on the word friend with pointed precision.

"Are you not here as his date?" Hannibal asked, finally looking away from Will to take in Alana's reaction.

"He agreed to come with me because I wanted a plus one," Alana said with a smile. "He's a good guy. A great… *buddy*. What are you playing now?"

"Bach," Will said with a shrug.

"As Liszt would play it," Hannibal disputed. "Can't you just play it as Bach would have played it?"

"Not when this aggravates you so much," Will laughed, delighting when Hannibal chuckled, too.

"So," Alana interjected. "My friend Liz offered to drive me home when you threatened to leave earlier. I'm going to catch a ride with her, okay?"

Will glanced up at her, pausing his hands on the keys. "I can drive you."

"Nope," Alana smiled. "You two should… catch up. It's been eleven years!" She moved to Will who was still sitting at the bench, leaning over him to press a kiss to his cheek. "Go for it, Will."

He blushed furiously, avoiding eye contact as guests began leaving, Alana included.

Eventually, it was only Will and Hannibal left in the living area with wait staff cleaning up in the kitchen. They stayed clear of the living room entirely, which made it even more awkward to be pacing the room with Hannibal loitering nearby. "Would you like a drink?" Hannibal asked.

"No," he said immediately. "I think I need to be sober for whatever you want to say to me."

Hannibal nodded, gesturing towards the large sofa in front of the fireplace. Will went to it carefully, sitting at the edge of it as if he'd spring up at any moment. Hannibal himself sat at the farthest end away from Will, giving him some much-needed space.

"I don't even know where to begin," Hannibal sighed, settling into the cushions while angling his body towards Will. One of his long legs crossed over the other, his pristine pant leg rising to expose a slender ankle.

"Let's start with why," Will offered bitterly. "Why did you hurt me the way that you did?"

“Do you remember while we were in Bergamo?” Hannibal asked softly. “We ran into my uncle’s financial advisor, Richard?”

“I remember him,” Will nodded. *Dick*. How could he forget?

“He called my uncle that night,” Hannibal said despondently. “Told him I was in an illicit relationship with a teenaged boy. Professor Graham’s son.”

“Coming home to that must have been difficult,” Will said dismissively. It didn’t justify being abandoned for eleven years.

Hannibal’s eyes flashed up at him, his jaw set tight in anger. “It was more than *difficult*. By the time I came home, my uncle had managed to dig up everything on you. Everything on your father. He had his lawyers set to tear down your parents’ lives. *My* life. He said he didn’t raise a pervert, and if I didn’t marry Bedelia, he’d see me in jail for pedophilia.”

Will’s mouth fell open, his blood running cold and hot at once. “I was seventeen! It was legal in Italy, Hannibal.”

“I told him that,” Hannibal said softly, his shoulders slumping. “He still threatened to ruin your father’s career. I’ve never told you, but… he had connections, Will. He knew everyone; politicians, professors, academics. He had pull with everyone because he had money. When I called you that winter, it wasn’t because I wanted to end things between us. It was because he’d caught wind that you applied to George Washington University. He told me that if I refused to marry Bedelia, he would reach out to the Dean of the college and have them revoke your acceptance letter. He said he would ensure that no college in the States would accept you by the time he was done with you. I couldn’t…” his voice broke along with Will’s heart. “I couldn’t allow that to happen to you. I couldn’t, Will.”

The man sounded utterly insane. Will couldn’t understand what difference it made to anyone else’s life if they loved one another. “Why did he give a shit, Hannibal? What the hell difference did it make to him if you loved me?”

“I am the last in the line of Lecter heirs,” Hannibal said immediately. “When I pass, our line is over. Twenty generations of our family will come to an end.”

“And how is that your responsibility?” Will asked bitterly. “Why didn’t he pop out some fucking kids?”

“He could not have children,” Hannibal replied. “He’d been to endless doctors, but the result was always the same. Any children my Aunt Murasaki had would not be fathered by my uncle.”

“Did you?” Will asked, heart breaking. “Have kids?”

He shook his head. “After his ultimatum, I went in secret to have a vasectomy a few months before I got married. Not that it mattered, really. I found out after a year with her that she was taking birth control the entire time. She didn’t want a child any more than I did.”

“You should have told me,” Will sighed, sweeping a few tears from his cheek. “I’ve spent so much of my life hating you, thinking you used me. Thinking that you were a liar.”

“I know,” Hannibal said softly. Brokenly. “Your hatred was good. It kept my uncle’s focus off you. Instead, he tore down the life of a man I saw in private after I married Bedelia. I started the affair to anger my uncle, but… I watched in horror as he tore Tim’s life to the ground. He lost his job, then his house. He moved away because he couldn’t get hired anywhere. A few phone calls and he was ousted from every job he applied to in the DA’s office from New York to Jersey. I felt terrible, but… all I could think was that at least it wasn’t you. At least he’d forgotten about the beautiful man that held my heart even after all that time.”

“He was insane, Hannibal. You should have pressed charges on him. Ruined his life as hard as he ruined your own.”

“I tried to speak to someone about him,” Hannibal admitted. “It was immensely difficult because he was very good friends with the district attorney in New York. No one cared, Will. Bedelia suggested we move, but I knew it wouldn’t matter where we went.”

“I met her,” Will said softly. “Bedelia.”

“She told me about meeting you. Said you bumped into her in the elevator.”

“She’s… beautiful,” Will admitted with a wince.

“She is,” he agreed. “Neither one of us wanted to get married, Will. She was strong-armed into it just as forcefully as I was.”

“I doubt that,” Will chuckled darkly.

“She has been in love with my aunt’s ward since she was eighteen. Chiyoh,” Hannibal smiled. “A beautiful woman, too. Bedelia has exquisite taste.”

“Wait,” Will huffed. “She’s…?”

“Just like us,” Hannibal nodded. “Our marriage has been a sham since day one. The only difference was that her parents didn’t give a damn who she saw outside of our marriage, so long as she was married. My uncle was… very determined that I would be loyal to her only. Her father passed about four years ago, so she began seeing Chiyoh shortly afterwards. When my uncle died, Bedelia told me that she didn’t want to live this way anymore, and I agreed with her. She and Chiyoh live together in Baltimore, now. They breed Persian longhaired cats and take vacations to Thailand frequently.”

Will swallowed back more tears, thinking about how miserable their lives had been all this time. It didn’t seem fair that others got to live their lives to the fullest, while he and Hannibal had suffered. “Why didn’t you reach out to me?”

“I reached out to your father,” Hannibal said regretfully. “I told you I called a few years ago. He told me you were seeing someone. Margot?”

“It was brief,” Will sighed. “Every relationship since you has been brief.”

“I still didn’t want to ruin any happiness you might have found,” Hannibal murmured. “You deserved to be happy. Happy and as far away from me as possible.”

“I’ve never stopped loving you,” Will admitted after a few beats of silence. “Never. Even when I hated you, I still loved you.”

“I know you don’t believe me,” Hannibal sighed, eyes watering while he stared at the fireplace. “I’ve loved you since I met you, Will. I have never stopped loving you. You’re still ingrained in me. My every thought, my every breath. I have no right to say this to you, but… I have loved you every moment of every day. You were right all those years ago.”

Will swiped at his own tears, then cleared his throat. “About what?”

“Loneliness. You do get used to it. There were points in my life where I felt there was no reason to go on. Why live when you’re so very unhappy? Why go on when there’s no reason to? I felt… trapped. Miserable, and trapped. I hated him, Will. There were times where instead of wanting to take my own life, I considered taking his instead.”

Will shifted closer, gripping Hannibal’s hands tight in his own. “No matter how bad anything gets, you *live*. You hear me? You *live*, Hannibal. I will never fucking forgive you if you give up.”

“I don’t feel that way anymore,” Hannibal said thickly. “It was… only in the beginning. After Tim left, I felt… utterly trapped. Bedelia spent many nights at Chiyoh’s house, and… I stayed home. I’ve gotten very good at being alone, now.”

His fingers trailed up Will’s wrist, fingering the silver bracelet with his thumb. “You wore this tonight, of all nights,” Hannibal said softly.

“I wear it every day,” Will admitted, making Hannibal glance up at him in shock. “I only take it off to clean it, really. It’s stayed on my wrist since I found it in my bag the day you left.”

Hannibal didn’t respond verbally, but his thick swallow was all the response Will needed to understand that he was moved by Will’s unwavering devotion to him.

“Have you… dated since he died?” Will didn’t know why he asked, because he really didn’t want to know.

“No,” Hannibal chuckled ruefully. “I kept thinking, this weekend, I’ll reach out to Will. This weekend, I will call him. Then I just… didn’t. I sometimes held the receiver in my hand for hours, trying to decide whether I should call or not. Wondering if I had any right to do so. I’ve done this for two years. Even Bedelia is sick of it already. She said you ran away from her like she was diseased.”

A bubble of laughter escaped Will’s mouth. “I didn’t want to meet her,” Will admitted with a blush. “Now I kind of feel bad about being such a dick.”

“She wasn’t offended,” Hannibal promised with a laugh. “She said you were beautiful, and… I have to agree with her. You’re still the most beautiful person I’ve ever seen.”

“Love is blind,” Will teased, lacing his fingers between Hannibal’s own. “You really are gay, you know. You were married to the single most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen in my life, and you still think I’m prettier than she is.”

“I’ve known that for a long, long, while,” Hannibal chuckled. “Bedelia was an excellent roommate, though. Our marriage wasn’t terrible for the first year or so, but… it eventually slid into friendship, only. We had separate bedrooms and separate lives, but I don’t begrudge her for it. I do love her, Will. She’s one of my best friends.”

“Then I guess I should meet her,” Will shrugged. “If she’s family.”

“*You* are my family,” Hannibal said fiercely. “You will *always* be my family.”

“Is your aunt still alive?” Will wondered.

He nodded. “She doesn’t care what I do, Will. She hasn’t spoken to me since my uncle passed, and I am perfectly fine with that.”

“Does Bedelia know… *everything*?” Will asked curiously. “I won’t be mad if she does. I just… want to know what she knows.”

“She knows I love you,” Hannibal admitted softly. “She knows your face from my sketches, though I didn’t precisely show them to her. She noses through my drawings occasionally. She thought you were beautiful then, too. She doesn’t know… details. Just… the general story.”

“No peaches?” Will asked with a laugh.

Hannibal’s laughter felt like sunshine after an eleven-year storm. “No peaches,” he laughed.

Will slid his hand from Hannibal’s, reaching up to stroke the high arch of a cheekbone with his thumb. It was still petal soft. Still unrealistically perfect against his fingertips. “You’re wrong, you know,” Will said softly.

“What about?” Hannibal asked while pressing his face into Will’s palm.

“I do believe you,” Will breathed. “I believe you when you say that you still love me. You gave me up to protect me and my family. Our family. That’s love, Hannibal. Even though I wish you’d have told me the truth years ago.”

“You would have asked to stay in touch,” Hannibal grimaced. “I couldn’t do that, Will. I ached without you. I ached so much that I felt like I was going insane. I needed to try and move on, and I couldn’t risk my uncle learning that we’d kept in touch. I would have hated myself if you lost your spot in school because my uncle meddled with your life. I hate myself for it, but I did what I thought was best, given the miserable circumstances.”

“I forgive you,” Will whispered. Hannibal’s eyes shone like there were burning embers in their depths, and he leaned forward just as Will leaned back, preventing the kiss he knew was coming. “I’m sorry,” he sighed.

“You forgive me, but I’m too late,” Hannibal said despondently.

“I didn’t say that,” he replied. “You don’t… We don’t *know* one another anymore. How about… we just… God this is so fucking weird, but… how about we date before diving back in? You might not like who I’ve become.”

Hannibal looked dubious, and even Will had some clue that it was a ridiculous thing to worry over. He’d been hurt by Hannibal, though. Hurt more deeply than anyone else had ever hurt him. He needed time, even if he understood why Hannibal did what he did. “I doubt that very much,” he said, though a smile was tipping the corners of his mouth upwards. “I would very, very, much like to date you, though.”

Will’s heart felt lighter in that moment than it had in as long as he could remember, and his smile might have been the first one that was genuine in just as long. “Good,” Will laughed, happy tears escaping his eyes.

“Is a hug out of the question?” Hannibal asked hopefully.

“It’s not,” Will said, gripping Hannibal’s arm to tug him close. Strong arms banded around his shoulders, and Will wrapped his own around the narrow dip of Hannibal’s waist. The embrace was tight and desperate, each clinging onto the other as if to make up for a lost decade. Gentle fingers carded through his curls, and he felt Hannibal inhale against the side of his neck.

“Do I smell the same?” Will laughed.

“Exactly,” Hannibal sighed. “My God, I’ve missed you so much.”

“I’ve missed you,” Will sighed, tipping his own face into Hannibal’s throat. He smelled very different, yet somehow exactly the same. The cologne was similar to what he used to wear all those years ago. Spicy and woodsy. It was clearly much more expensive than what he wore before, and Will found he didn’t mind it so much. There was no coconut sunscreen or sweat, but one of those things could be a scent he reacquainted with if he’d push this in the right direction.

He couldn’t. He wasn’t ready. If Hannibal withdrew from him again after he’d given Hannibal his heart freely, he would never survive it. Caution was needed here, even though he was reasonably certain he’d be shattered if they separated again regardless.

“Do you have dogs?” Hannibal asked after a beat.

Will laughed in his arms, pulling away to wipe at the tears that just wouldn’t fuck off already. “I have… seven dogs.”

Hannibal blinked at him. “Seven?”

“Seven. I was tired of being lonely, and… I didn’t want to date anyone. Dogs are good. They love you whether you’re miserable or not.”

“I look forward to meeting them,” Hannibal said, although it seriously didn’t really sound like that was the truth.

“Liar,” Will laughed.

“No,” Hannibal said seriously. “Seven is a little intimidating, yes. But I truly do want to meet them. Your family.”

“They’re good dogs,” Will promised with a laugh. They each eased back into their seats, knees brushing while their hands interlaced over Will’s thigh. “I had only six until about a year ago. Winston was on the side of the road, filthy and starving. I brought him home with me, fully intending to get him clean and fed before finding a new home for him. He and Buster became thick as thieves, and… I fell in love with him. So, he’s stayed.”

“You’ve always had a heart of gold,” Hannibal chuckled.

“You’ve always been the only one that thought so,” Will retorted with a laugh. “I read your book.”

“Did you?” Hannibal beamed. “What did you think?”

“Flowery language,” Will chuckled, raising their clasped hands thoughtlessly to press a kiss to his knuckles in an effort to ease the sting of his comment. “Your focus on Achilles and Patroclus being lovers was… surprising. The way you spoke of them… their love. Their connection to one another. It felt…”

“Familiar?” Hannibal wondered.

“Yes,” Will breathed. “Very familiar. Is that how you saw us? Doomed from the start?”

“I wrote that at a point in my life where I was certain we’d never see one another again,” he explained morosely. “I don’t think I feel that way now.”

“Your dedication page,” Will said carefully, rubbing Hannibal’s hand with his thumb.

“I cannot love you without loving myself. I cannot love myself without loving you. We are the same.”

“That,” Will said thickly. “You dedicated that book to me?”

“Who else, Will?” he asked softly.

It was silent for a few minutes, and Will took a moment to glance around at the opulent room surrounding him. “Was this your home with Bedelia?”

“No,” he chuckled. “She and I had a home on Chandler Square for about a year after we moved to Baltimore. She spent more time with Chiyoh than she did there. Once my uncle passed, we sold the home, and each moved to our own houses. Would you like a tour?”

“Now?” Will asked with a raised eyebrow.

“No time like the present,” Hannibal shrugged.

He followed Hannibal first into the hall that connected the living area to the dining area, which he'd already seen. "This is the formal dining room," he announced. "I love having dinner parties. I love cooking for friends, really."

"So I've noticed," Will smiled. There was a wall of herbs around the window, mounted tastefully directly to the wall in teak planters. "Is this…?"

"Basil and thyme are from Italy," Hannibal blushed. "I almost lost the basil in the move. I was devastated until it bounced back to life."

"I can't believe you've kept it alive for eleven years," Will chuckled.

"Ten," Hannibal shrugged. "It was only a seed when I planted it the following spring after I returned home. I learned a lot from Anchise while I was there. How is he?"

"He passed," Will said softly. "A few years ago. Heart attack."

"Poor man," Hannibal grimaced. "He was very kind. Have they hired a new man to tend the orchards?"

Will shook his head. "My mom and dad did it this summer with a few of my cousins. It's getting hard on them, and… I know they want me to come back home. It feels like they're going to sell it, which is… unthinkable to me."

"It would be devastating to lose your family home, Will," Hannibal promised. Hannibal would know how that felt more than anyone. "Trust me. I know how it feels."

Will took his hand in his own, squeezing his fingers reassuringly. "Come," he offered. "See the kitchen."

The rest of the house was absolutely stunning, and Will let himself be lead upstairs to the bedrooms. "I'm not attempting anything untoward," Hannibal promised at the look on Will's face. "I just… wish to show you something."

His bedroom was done tastefully in dark blues and cream whites, the enormous bed taking up the far wall parallel to the windows. Hannibal went to a cedar chest at the foot of his bed, waving for Will to come closer.

He opened the chest, and Will's mouth fell open.

Hannibal fluffed out a faded, wine-stained, sunny-yellow bedsheet. "It hasn't been washed since I washed it that morning," Hannibal chuckled. "It used to smell of chamomile laundry detergent, sunshine, and lavender, but it… it's faded, now."

Will reached out and touched it, running his fingers over the time-softened fabric reverently. "You kept it," he rasped.

"How could I not?" Hannibal chuckled, touching the wine stain with gentle fingers. "I've only made love until sunrise once in my life, and it was with you on this poor, unsuspecting, bedsheet."

Will glanced into the chest, his heart constricting at the sight of a faded blue bathing suit. Hannibal fluffed it out, holding it up dubiously. “I doubt either of us are fitting in this anymore,” he chuckled.

“Speak for yourself,” Will laughed, snatching the bathing suit from Hannibal’s fingers. He fluffed it out, sticking one leg into them, then the other. He tugged them up over his slacks, wincing because it felt tight in places that it really, really, shouldn’t. “Maybe a bit too small,” Will chuckled.

Hannibal’s eyes had darkened as Will turned to see himself in the mirror, his eyes set on Will’s backside with such rapt interest that Will blushed. “My apricot has gotten a little bigger since I was a kid.”

“Ripened,” Hannibal blurted, biting his lip when he realized what he’d said out loud.

“You think it’s blushing in shame, Hannibal?” he teased.

“Will,” he pleaded miserably, fists clenching on his thighs where he sat at the edge of the bed.

“Sorry,” he blushed while fighting his way out of the tiny, tiny, bathing suit.

He handed them off, and Hannibal immediately brought them to his nose, which definitely made Will blush in shame, then. “What are you doing?”

“Forgive me,” Hannibal sighed, eyes closed after his deep, inappropriate, inhale against the fabric. “Should I only do that once you leave? Pretend we both think I would never do such a thing?”

“I prefer if you never pretend with me,” Will said thickly, eyeing the strong curve of Hannibal’s shoulder. “I would have done the same thing.”

“We are the same,” Hannibal murmured, a small smile lifting the corners of his lips.

“I should…” Will said hesitantly, glancing towards the bedroom door as the tension mounted between them. It was still there. Still buzzing like a livewire under Will’s skin. If he didn’t leave, he’d have Hannibal naked under him in less than a minute. “I should go.”

“Did you keep Billowy?” he asked suddenly.

Will laughed awkwardly, blushing to his hairline. “I still have Billowy,” he nodded. “I still have… everything I’ve ever taken from you. And everything you’ve ever given me.”

Hannibal nodded at that, eyes lifting to a picture on the wall behind Will. He turned, staring at the few sprigs of dried lavender that had been mounted in a picture frame. The ones he’d pressed into the book of poetry all those years ago. “I’ve kept everything you’ve ever given me, too.”

He stood from the bed, moving to the nightstand to open the drawer. He withdrew a worn and well-loved book from its depths, and Will’s breath caught in his throat. He went to Hannibal slowly, accepting the book of poetry by Gabriele D’Annunzio with an outstretched hand.

It had clearly been well loved since he'd given it away. The binding was worn and creased with wear. The pages yellowed and frayed from the frequent handling it had gotten. "You keep this by your bed," Will breathed.

"I read it almost every night," Hannibal admitted. "When I first got home, I poured over it, looking for anything about you that I missed. The book opened by itself to a few poems, and I wondered if they were your favorites. I've learned this book by heart, I think," Hannibal said softly.

"He wasn't a good man in life," Will shrugged, "but he sure knew how to write poetry."

"Agreed," Hannibal chuckled.

Will passed the worn-out book back to him, where it was placed carefully back inside the nightstand. "You sleep surrounded by reminders of me."

Hannibal stood from the bed, smoothing wrinkles that didn't exist from his slacks. "I am sick, aren't I?" Hannibal grimaced.

"I wish everyone were as sick as you," Will breathed, moving closer without even realizing it. Hannibal's eyes had darkened to coal, the pupil eating away at his irises. "I used to sleep in nothing at all aside from Billowy," he admitted. "I wore it so much that I wore the fabric right out. There's… there's a tear here," he said, showing Hannibal on his own button-down where the fabric had given way by pressing his fingertips against his chest. "I stopped wearing it because I feared it would end up in shreds."

Hannibal licked his lips while staring at Will's mouth. He swallowed as if he had an excess of saliva, which made Will salivate in response. Without a word, he drifted away towards his closet, withdrawing a wine-red button down from its depths. It looked almost exactly like Billowy looked all those years ago, just… newer. Shinier. The fabric shifted in the low bedroom light, and Will took it from Hannibal with a raised eyebrow. "Your new Billowy," Hannibal said softly. "I want you to have it."

"I can't accept this," Will blurted, blushing fiercely. "Hannibal, I can't."

"Please," Hannibal said, gripping Will's hand before he could toss the shirt onto the bed. "I wish I would have had something like Billowy throughout the years. It's just a shirt, Will."

The fabric was cool and unbelievably soft. It felt like silk, and knowing Hannibal's tastes, he was certain it was. He knew without a doubt that he was putting it on when he got home. Nothing at all between himself and this shirt. "Thank you," he blushed.

"Will you wear it tonight?" Hannibal asked with a blush of his own.

"This," Will nodded, tipping his face away as he blushed so hard his ears felt hot. "This, and nothing else."

Hannibal groaned, moving away from Will a few steps. "Thank you for that, Will," he chuckled.

“I should seriously go now,” he laughed. “Come walk me out, please.”

Hannibal walked him to the door where they lingered again. Hannibal took his peacoat from the hook, fluffing the material out before helping Will into it. His hands brushed over Will’s shoulders, pretending to smooth down fabric that Will knew didn’t need to be smoothed. Will turned, tipping his face up so their eyes could meet. “You’re going to call me?” he asked hesitantly.

“Tomorrow,” Hannibal promised, tugging Will close by the lapels of his coat. “Maybe tonight, too. I’ll call so much that you’re sick of me.”

“Doubtful,” Will chuckled, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders just as the older man held him gently around his waist. The hug lingered and expanded, each taking little liberties with the other. Will inhaled at his throat, his fingers wandering over Hannibal’s broad shoulders curiously. Hannibal’s hands gripped his waist, subtly tracing the line of his back over the fabric of his coat.

He didn’t want to let him go. He’d let Hannibal go enough for a lifetime, and it seemed unthinkable to release him now that he was in his arms. “Will,” he breathed into Hannibal’s ear.

Hannibal shivered, holding Will a little tighter. “Hannibal,” he whispered, lips brushing the shell of Will’s ear. “Hannibal, Hannibal,” he repeated.

Will’s eyes closed of their own accord, and before he could refrain himself, his mouth met Hannibal’s own.

He felt Hannibal tremble against him, his fingers digging into the fabric of Will’s coat as though he could scarcely believe it were happening. Will dug his fingers into his perfectly coifed hair, gripping the silken strands while angling his mouth, parting his lips.

The first brush of their tongues almost made Will’s knees give out, but Hannibal held him tight, tilting his head to deepen the kiss with a deep groan rumbling in his throat. He tasted sweet. He tasted exactly as he did all those years ago.

What was even more unbelievable was that he still felt the same. He still kissed Will like he wanted to devour him. He still held him like he wanted to press their skin together until they became one person.

You won’t survive it if he abandons you again, he thought. He pulled away abruptly, trying to gasp air into his lungs that didn’t seem to exist. The air felt thin and reedy, like he was on a mountain top, and he didn’t own enough red cells to bring oxygen where he needed it.

Hannibal looked no better. His eyes were dark, lips shining and red. His hair was an absolute mess because of Will’s fingers, but he looked good. Delicious.

Perfectly ripe and ready for taking.

Will shook his head while taking a careful step back. “I shouldn’t have…”

“Yes,” Hannibal rasped. “Yes, you really, really, should have.”

“I need… I need to go slowly,” Will said in perfect contradiction to the firm mauling he’d given the other man. “I need it, Hannibal. If you… if you decide you’re not… interested anymore, then I need to be as distanced from you as I can possibly be. I can’t… I won’t survive it if I love you as much as I did then, and you abandon me again.”

He watched Hannibal’s face shutter closed, his perfect mask sliding into place to hide the anguish that had flickered there briefly. “I have no intention of letting you go a second time,” Hannibal said slowly. “But you have every right to doubt me. I will go as slowly as you need me to. I will do whatever you need me to do. I just… I’m sorry, Will. God, I’m sorry.”

“I know,” Will sighed, swiping a hand across his jaw to keep himself from kissing him again. “I know you are. I hate that our relationship was severed by someone else. I hate that we’ve both been so unhappy all this time.”

“I will not abandon you again,” Hannibal promised, even though Will couldn’t understand how he could promise such a thing, yet. “But the reverse may happen. I haven’t been… intimate in a long time. I don’t just mean sex, although it’s been a long while for that, too. I mean… I haven’t been open with anyone since you, Will. I need to relearn how to trust someone else. How to share myself with someone else. I worry that I’ll push you away because I’m… damaged.”

Will laughed, and Hannibal glanced up at him in offense. “Sorry,” he chuckled. “You think I have any right at all to abandon someone for being damaged? Are you even paying attention to the kind of human wreckage I am?”

“It’s my fault,” Hannibal sighed.

“No,” Will shook his head, reaching out to lace their fingers together. “It’s your uncle’s fault. Maybe it’s the fault of the men who broke into your house and put you in his life in the first place. None of this is your fault, Hannibal. If… if I were in the same position as you were, I would have done the same. To protect you. To save your future. I would have done the same thing.”

Hannibal said nothing to that. If anything, he looked even more remorseful than he did a moment before. “How about you come to dinner at my house tomorrow night? If you don’t mind the drive to Wolf Trap?” he blurted out.

Will’s insides warmed as Hannibal’s face lit up. They were still the same, even after all this time. “Would you like me to?”

“Yes,” he said immediately. “I have nothing planned, and… I can make you trout? I caught a few the other day and they’re gutted and scaled, waiting for me to do something with them. Come by for six?”

“I am not familiar with Wolf Trap,” he admitted sheepishly.

“Call me tomorrow,” Will smiled. “I’ll give you detailed directions, k?”

Leaving was awkward. It was blatantly obvious that each of them wanted to step into one another again, though Will really wanted to take it slow, and Hannibal was clearly trying to be respectful of his wishes. It still hurt to leave his house with just a friendly, ‘Goodnight,’ tossed over his shoulder, Billowy the Second clasped in his fist.

Chapter End Notes

Little true story for you guys:

My mom was best friends with this guy Steve through elementary school, then high school. He was gay, though he wasn't 'out', really. He played in a folk group with my mom and another guy, Tom, for years. Steve and Tom were inseparable for almost ten years, though they weren't in a relationship, really.

In the eighties, their little folk group split up after my Mom got married. The AIDS pandemic hit, and Steven ended up marrying some woman that he met while working at a golf ball plant. He told my mom later that he married her because he was afraid. Afraid to die. Afraid to be open about who he was. Still, he stayed married to her for almost ten years until he decided to be himself in the mid-nineties.

He moved to New York to start over, where he bumped into Tom for the first time since their little folk group split up. He and Tom reconnected and started seeing one another, and that's that. They've been together ever since, and got married the same year that I did; 2012.

He and Tom live in New York and breed Persian cats together. We still get Christmas cards from them, surrounded by a cloud of fluffy white cats every year.

This chapter is dedicated to Tom and Steve, and everyone in the world who is finally accepting who they are. You deserve to be happy.

Thanks for reading. I am BEHIND on comments, but I swear I am getting to them the moment I stop rambling here. Love you guys!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was an hour drive back to his house, and it was after two by the time he pulled up his driveway. He still took the time to let the dogs outside, sitting on his porch while they brought him sticks and rocks from the surrounding darkness.

He could have been in Hannibal's bed right now. He could have been making love to the only person he'd ever truly made love to in his life.

But he was stubborn, and he chose… *this* instead.

While it was true that he loved being home with his dogs… he'd missed Hannibal for *eleven years*.

He was wearing Hannibal's red shirt. The new one he'd been given only hours before. The fabric was soft and cool against his skin, and it smelled of Hannibal's cologne. His home. True to his word, he laid in his bed with nothing on aside from the button-down. Billowy the Second.

He touched himself while rubbing his nipple through the silky material, biting his lip while thinking about the way Hannibal tasted. The way his tongue brushed his own. The way his big hands held him close.

With Hannibal's scent in his nose and his taste on his tongue, he came all over himself, jerking his cock roughly while lifting the collar of the shirt to his nose.

Once he was finished, he cleaned himself up a bit, then crawled into bed feeling ashamed of himself.

The phone woke him up the next morning, and he rolled from the bed with a groan. "H'lo?"

"I wasn't sure you'd be home," Alana teased. The smile was evident in her voice.

"Got home around two, I think," he shrugged, even if she couldn't see it. "What time is it?"

"Almost ten," she laughed. "You had a good night, I guess?"

"It was good. Kind of… strange to be in his company again after so long."

"In a bad way?" she wondered.

"No," Will sighed, stretching on the bed. He huffed a breath when Buster jumped up to join him, smashing his stomach with his little legs. "Strange in that it felt like no time had passed

at all."

"He's the one you bumped into last week, isn't he? The one that made you drink yourself into oblivion?"

"Yeah," Will grimaced. "He didn't *make* me… I just… Alana, I've never spoken about him to anyone, and this is… weird for me."

"You're still in love with him after all this time," she said knowingly. "What's even crazier is that he is so obviously in love with you, Will. You were seventeen when you met him… how old was *he*? Twenty-five? Twenty-six?"

"Twenty-five," Will said defensively. "It's not whatever you think it is. He didn't do anything that I didn't want, I promise you."

"I just can't picture it," she went on. "The man I know… Dr. Lecter is a shining example of propriety. He's polite and respectful. He's… almost prudish."

Will snorted, thinking of his special peach Bellini that he asked Will to make him that summer. "I've never known him to be a prude," he chuckled.

"Can I ask what happened? Why you lost contact?"

He debated it, weighing how truthful he wanted to be with her as well as whether he could tell her Hannibal's most private issues with his family. "It just… happened. I had another year of high school to do, and he was still working towards his doctorate. The last I heard was that he was getting married, and we just… drifted apart." More like they were abruptly severed apart, but she didn't need to know the details.

"Their marriage was… strange," she admitted. "When I first met him, I didn't even know he was married. He never wore a ring, and any time I was in his company, he never mentioned her. Then about two years ago, he invited me to his Christmas party, and there she was. I was… very confused. She is an ice queen in her own right. Not a funny bone in her body."

"I don't want to talk about her," Will blurted. Not for the reasons she thought, but… because they'd both suffered so much already. They both loved other people but were forced to marry whether they wanted to or not. It wasn't fair to judge her based on one single night. Or one single meeting.

"Sorry," she said immediately. "Will, I'm sorry. All I'm trying to say is that this time, you have his attention. Something tells me you've always had his attention. That bracelet you wear… he gave it to you, didn't he?"

He touched it immediately, running his index finger across the cool metal. "How do you know that?"

"He looked like he saw a ghost when you rolled up your sleeves," she chuckled. "He stared at it for so long I thought it was about to burst into flames."

"Jesus."

“Sorry,” she repeated. “You’ve worn it the entire time I’ve known you. I’ve always wondered about it.”

“He gave it to me the day he left,” Will admitted with a shrug she couldn’t see. “I’ve… I’ve worn it ever since.”

There was silence for a few minutes, then, “When are you seeing him again?”

Will smiled at that, stretching against the bed with a yawn. “Today, actually. He’s coming for dinner.”

“Wow!” she laughed. “Wasting no time, I see.”

“I’ve got to go,” he said apologetically. “My dogs have to go outside, and I need the bathroom, too.”

“Too much info,” she laughed. “Okay. I just wanted to check in on you.”

Get some dirt, Will thought. “Thanks for that,” he said with a scowl. “Talk to you soon.”

He put his dogs outside then went to relieve himself, sighing as the phone began ringing again. He washed his hands quickly, then dashed to the receiver in the kitchen. “Yeah?” he answered curtly.

“Will?” a soft voice said hesitantly.

“Hannibal,” he breathed. “Hi. Sorry. I thought you were Alana calling me back.”

“Are you expecting her call so early?” he wondered, jealousy creeping into his tone.

“No,” he grinned, tugging the phone cord to untangle it. He needed coffee, stat. “She called already this morning. Wanted details that I really didn’t feel like divulging. I also think she just wanted to see if I came home last night.”

“Are the two of you rather close?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Will shrugged, cradling the phone in his neck while scooping out coffee grinds. “She’s… kind of a friend. As much of a friend as I am capable of having, anyway. Did you call me to talk to me about Alana?”

“No,” he chuckled. “I called to hear your voice. I called to make sure last night wasn’t a dream.”

Will touched the red button down he was wearing, smiling to himself while switching the coffeemaker on. “I am wearing your red shirt,” he said softly.

“What else?” Hannibal asked just as softly.

“The answer would have been nothing about fifteen minutes ago,” he chuckled. “I’ve got boxers on, now. Had to put the dogs out and didn’t want to catch a breeze.”

“So my red shirt, and boxers,” he groaned. “Sounds just as lovely.”

“*My* red shirt,” Will countered. “Billowy the Second. Was this shirt big on you?” he asked, fluffing the excess material away from his chest, trying to determine just how Hannibal filled it out himself. He caught a whiff of Hannibal’s cologne, and he promptly buried his nose in the material to sniff it out.

“No,” he laughed. “Is it big on you, beloved?”

“I’d say,” he grinned. His coffee pot beeped, and he sighed in relief while pouring himself a cup. “Shirttails come down to my thighs, and there’s a lot of excess around my chest.”

“I want to see it in person someday,” he sighed.

“Something tells me that you will,” he chuckled. “You still coming for dinner tonight?”

“Yes,” he replied immediately. “I need directions, though. And I wanted to see if it’s… acceptable if I come to you earlier. I want to see you.”

“Got a pen?” Will asked with a wide smile.

He was coming. To Will’s house.

Will was about to have a panic attack; he knew it just by his racing heart. With a scrutinizing eye, he looked at his house and compared it to Hannibal’s own. It was small. Quaint. Rustic and… God, so fucking embarrassing.

The dust suddenly seemed disgusting. The dog hair everywhere utterly unacceptable. He cleaned like a madman while his dogs looked on with mild concern on their faces. They could pick up how nervous Will was, and it in turn made them nervous.

In two hours, his house was cleaned from top to bottom and there were two trout defrosting in lemon water on the counter. Once he was finished, he was sweaty and disgusting, so he headed up for a shower so he could be presentable when Hannibal got here.

He chose a cream white sweater and gray slacks, stepping into them quickly because the doorbell was ringing already. His dogs were going insane, and he jogged downstairs with wet hair and a flushed face.

His dogs nearly mowed him down when he opened the door, brushing past him at the speed of light to investigate who was visiting. Hannibal’s eyes widened on Will for half a second before he had to step back and brace himself for the furry mob that was attacking his legs. “No jumping!” Will scolded them, laughing despite their behavior because of Hannibal’s shocked expression.

“There really are seven of them,” he chuckled, petting whatever furry face bobbed up to get to his hands.

“There are seven,” Will agreed. Hannibal was dressed down in a gray sweater and black slacks. He looked so fucking soft and comfortable that Will kind of wanted to jump on him, much like the dogs were.

They eventually grew bored of their new guest, bounding off into the front yard with excited barks and wagging tails. Hannibal watched them with a wide smile on his face, discretely wiping drool onto his slacks. “They’re sweet, Will.”

“I’ll introduce you all once they calm down,” he chuckled. “Want to sit out here for a minute?”

Hannibal nodded, turning his eyes away from the endless expanse of woods around them to focus instead on Will’s face. “Your home reminds me of Italy, kind of.”

“Are you drunk?” Will teased with a laugh. He sat on his wicker loveseat, patting the cushion by his hip. Hannibal sat down almost timidly, his leg brushing Will’s as he got comfortable.

“You’ve just gotten out of the shower,” he remarked. His jaw was clenched as tight as his fist over his leg, and Will raised an eyebrow.

“So?”

“You smell… incredible,” he said with a rough exhale of breath. His eyes were growing dark as they flickered over Will’s face. “Like you did in Italy. Mafalda’s care packages are absolute torture for me.”

“Remembering our showers together?” Will teased, nudging his foot with his own.

Hannibal’s back stiffened more if it were even possible. “Remembering how you smelled when you came to bed. Or the way you smelled when you joined us at the breakfast table. I can still remember exactly the way your skin tasted after you had showered. The way the traces of soap lingered on your skin.”

Will swallowed thickly, hunching over to hide his growing arousal. It was futile, because Hannibal’s nostrils flared. “You smell exactly as you did when you’d come to our bed. Will, you’re killing me.”

“*I’m* killing *you*?” he asked indignantly.

Hannibal huffed, fists clenching as though he either wanted to throttle Will or maul him. Maybe both. “It was no trouble finding your house. Your directions were flawless.”

Will blinked at the abrupt change of topic but was somewhat grateful for it. “I’ve learned how to do it after all this time. When you live out in the sticks, your directions need to be perfect.”

“I really love it, Will,” he sighed, turning his eyes out towards the front yard where his dogs were running free. “They’re sweet.”

“You don’t know them yet,” Will laughed. “Come on. I’ll show you the inside.”

Will whistled for the dogs to come back, and they headed inside before Hannibal did.

Hannibal was taking in the space with a little smile lifting his lips. “I love it, Will. It’s… very you.”

Despite the cleaning he’d done, it was still chaotic. His walls had fly-fishing lures mounted where they’d fit best. His lure-making desk was covered in random bits of bone and feathers that he’d found while outside with the dogs. There was a fishing box to the side of his desk that he’d forgotten to put away somewhere.

His piano was covered in sheet music and notebooks, the small table by the side of it covered in a heap of sheet music that he was in the process of transcribing. To top it all off, his coffee table was littered with student essays that he was grading.

His two built-in bookcases were stuffed to overflowing, books piled high on the tables and floor surrounding the bookcase. From an outsider’s point of view, he looked like a fucking hermit.

“It’s…” he struggled. “It’s home.”

Hannibal moved into the house slowly, taking in the few pieces of artwork on the walls. Most of it came from his parents, and he knew some of the pieces were very pricy in the hands of the right collector. “These are lovely,” he said absently, moving along the wall until he got to a sketch that he himself had drawn.

Silence descended while Hannibal stared at the sketch of their interlaced hands. The paper in the picture frame had yellowed a bit over the years, but it was still just as Hannibal had drawn it; free from smudges or stains. “You kept this,” he breathed.

“Of course I did,” Will replied. “I told you, I’ve kept everything you’ve ever given me.”

He seemed completely lost for words. Those amber eyes stared at the sketch as though they’d seen a ghost, and Will cleared his throat. “Want to see the rest of the house?”

Hannibal nodded, turning away from the wall with glassy eyes. “Lead the way.”

The rest of the house was a quaint little kitchen that was filled with cooking utensils and pans from Italy as well as a few potted herb plants along the windowsill. The dining room was also small, but had a dining table in it that Will had made himself.

It was… surreal to have Hannibal in his house. It was something he’d never thought would ever happen, yet… it was happening.

Will needed a drink, even though it was barely three in the afternoon. “Want a drink?” he asked politely.

“Yes,” he answered immediately. Maybe Will wasn’t the only one suffering from disbelief over their situation.

“My parents just shipped me a case of rosatello,” he offered.

“Have they really?” Hannibal smiled, turning to look at Will fondly. “That sounds perfect.”

With a nod, Will abandoned him to head into the kitchen to open a bottle and get some glasses out of the cabinet. His hands were shaking, sweat rolling down his back in his mounting anxiety. He took a few extra minutes to calm himself down at the kitchen counter before heading into the living room.

Hannibal was petting his dogs, sitting in his leather armchair by the window. He looked almost too big for the chair, his long legs splayed out so his dogs could approach him more easily. “That’s Max,” Will said, handing his wine glass off to Hannibal’s outstretched hand.

Their fingers brushed, and Will shivered before sitting on the sofa. “Hey Max,” Hannibal greeted, ruffling the fur on the big dog’s head affectionately.

“The little guy bouncing by your leg is Buster,” Will chuckled. The dog was positively desperate for a pet, and his exuberance was frankly adorable. Winston jumped on the couch to sit by Will’s hip, and he pet him gently. “This is Winston.”

“Winston,” Hannibal smiled. “Your most recent adoption.”

“You remembered,” Will blushed.

“I remember everything,” he promised softly.

Will needed a minute after that, sipping his wine for some courage. He introduced Hannibal to the rest of his pack, and Hannibal made sure to pet every single one of them. Will had no doubt that he would remember all their names, just by how he repeated them as if memorizing them.

One glass of wine became two, though conversation kind of stilted after he’d talked about his dogs at length. “You became a professor,” Hannibal said, nodding to the student essays scattered across his coffee table.

“Not willingly,” he sighed. “I wanted to be a profiler, but… the things I see weigh on me too much. I’m good at it, but… it takes a toll. I’m only called out for the worst scenes, and it’s not enough money to get by. Teaching at the academy helps me to survive.”

“Do you love what you do, Will?” he asked softly.

“No,” Will replied immediately, feeling a blush heat his cheeks. “I thought it would be like… like being a superhero. It’s not like that at all. We almost never catch the serial killers we’re looking for, so… there are a lot of gruesome scenes that feel… hopeless.”

“Do you regret…?” he started asking but seemed to think better of it.

“Sometimes,” Will answered truthfully. “My parents wanted me to go to Julliard, and… sometimes I really wish I would have done that. I’ve taken a few music theory classes since graduation from GWU, but… just for fun, really. Just because I wanted to.”

“You play beautifully,” Hannibal said softly. “I had honestly forgotten how talented you are with the piano. With music. You express yourself with it so candidly. Much more candidly than you do in conversation.”

“I’ve been thinking about giving lessons in my spare time,” Will shrugged. “Teaching my skillset to kids, maybe.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea,” Hannibal smiled.

“Do you love psychiatry?” Will wondered.

Hannibal grimaced, crossing one long leg over the other. “Not particularly. I wanted to teach, but…”

“But?”

“My uncle wanted me to open my own practice,” he admitted under his breath. “There’s more money to be made in a private practice than there is in teaching at a university.”

“He ran your life, didn’t he?” Will said, feeling the heat of his wine in his blood, now. “Jesus, Hannibal. You’re your own person.”

“His voice is still in my head,” he whispered, eyes turning to look out Will’s window. “I don’t need the money. I have more than I know what to do with, but… I still hear him. I still feel guilty when I think about doing something… different.”

“I can’t give you shit,” he sighed. “I wanted this profession even though it disappointed my parents. Even though music has always been my life. I fucking hate what I do, and I’m too stubborn to admit that I made a mistake.”

“You’re still so young, Will,” Hannibal replied, finally turning those eyes back to Will. “You can do anything you want to do.”

“I don’t know *what* I want to do,” he admitted ruefully. “Sometimes I miss home so much it feels like I can’t breathe. Sometimes all I want is to get on a plane and go home, but… I can’t do it. I visit for Christmas break and summer vacation, and every time I come back here afterwards, I feel like I’m leaving pieces of myself behind.”

“Now that my divorce is almost finalized, I’ve been considering what else I’d like to do,” Hannibal admitted. “Time for a change, but… I’ve no idea what that change is, yet.”

“I thought your divorce was done?” Will blurted.

“It is,” Hannibal shrugged. “We’re still dividing properties. We have a house in the Hamptons as well as a villa in Spain. Our assets aren’t quite divided up, yet.”

Will swigged his wine, trying his best to put out the flare of jealousy in his gut. Romantic getaways to Spain and the Hamptons with his beautiful wife. How nice for them both.

“What a dilemma for you,” Will snarked.

“It isn’t,” he sighed. “I’ve told her to take all of it. I’ve signed both houses to her, but she still doesn’t want it. She says we’re both culpable for the marriage we’ve had.”

“Nice of her,” Will said curtly.

Silence descended again, each sipping their wine in more than slight discomfort. “Has there been anyone for you, Will?”

Will winced, reaching out to set his wine glass down on the table. “There were others,” he admitted slowly. “My senior year of high school… after you called to tell me you were getting married… I ended up seeing Antony for that summer.”

“Antony?” Hannibal repeated, clearly struggling to understand who that was. Will knew the moment it clicked because his mouth set in a firm line. “The boy who didn’t understand the meaning of the word ‘no.’”

“He had been drinking, Hannibal,” he said defensively. “He was… he was really good to me.”

“What happened?” he asked, though it seemed like the question pained him.

“Nothing, really,” Will shrugged. “I came here for college, and he went off to London for college. That kind of ended that, really. There were no hard feelings, though.”

“Did you…” he swallowed thickly. “Did you love him?”

“No,” Will sighed. “No… even though I know he loved me. There were a few others in college. A few after college. Nothing serious, and nothing… worth the effort.”

“It kills me, Will,” he admitted despondently. “It kills me.”

“You think it didn’t kill me?” Will spat, anger and wine heating his cheeks. “To know that even though I loved you more than I’ve ever loved anyone, you were out there somewhere, fucking your wife? Thinking that I meant nothing at all to you? Thinking you’d used me? You think that didn’t kill me, Hannibal?”

“I’m sorry,” he said thickly. “I shouldn’t… I should never have said that. Forgive me, please.”

“I’ve already forgiven you,” he admitted. “I told you that if I were in your place, I would have done anything to protect you. I understand why you did what you did, but for years I didn’t know. I didn’t trust anyone, afterwards. Even Antony… who was so fucking patient and good. I still waited for him to abandon me every step of the way.”

“Do you still… see him?” he asked carefully.

“Sometimes,” Will admitted. “His parents own a villa outside of Crema, and they come down for the summer. He visits them for a week here and there, and we get together sometimes. Not… romantically. Just as friends, even though I know he would have more if I wanted it. I don’t, though. He’s been in a relationship with someone for the last four years, so it’s taken a lot of the awkwardness out of spending time with him. His partner is a good man.”

Hannibal took a deep breath, setting his own wine glass down on the end table. “I felt so hopeful for us, yesterday.”

“Meaning?” Will asked defensively.

“Meaning I wonder if too much time has passed,” he sighed. “Meaning I’ve hurt you too much for this to ever… work.”

“You’re a fucking coward,” Will chuckled bitterly. “The second things get hard you’re what? Gone? Unreliable asshole.”

Amber eyes flashed at him in warning, but Will held his ground. “I *am* thinking of you, Will. How can you trust me after what I’ve done to you? After abandoning you the way that I did? This will only hurt more if we drag it out.”

“Then fucking *leave*,” Will spat, moving to his feet to leave the room. “Go *away*. Go get all the men you couldn’t have all these years. Go. You’re so *good* at that, you goddamned-”

A firm hand had gripped his upper arm before he was turned and kissed with such determined enthusiasm that Will sagged against him. His heart slammed in his ribs, and he gripped Hannibal’s shoulders while biting his lips, kissing him back with all the anger and resentment he felt in his body.

That little spark of something still thrummed hot between them, and Will fucking hated him for it. He still loved him more than he’d ever loved another person, and he hated him for that, too.

Hannibal’s mouth was wet and sweet with wine, his hands groping and desperate, all over Will’s back and shoulders. Fingers threaded through his hair, and he moaned into the kiss, biting that plump upper lip between his teeth.

Their lips met again; this time softer. Gentler. Hannibal’s tongue licked into his mouth, tasting him like it was the first time he’d ever done so. He pulled away as the kiss tapered off, each of them breathing hard with drooping eyelids. “I will never leave you,” Hannibal promised, even though he couldn’t make such a promise. “Never. Never,” he repeated. “I still love you, Will.”

“You don’t know me anymore,” he argued futilely. It was a stupid thing to say, because he still knew Hannibal. He knew him because he knew himself.

“I know you,” he argued, kissing Will again. His lips were damp with either his own or Will’s saliva, not that it mattered whose it was. “What you do for a living, what you enjoy on the weekends… None of that matters. I know you. I know myself.”

“I still go fly-fishing on the weekends,” Will said stupidly, making Hannibal laugh.

“Goose,” he said fondly, kissing Will again. Then again.

Will held onto him like he would sink into the floorboards if he let Hannibal go, kissing him back each and every time their lips met. “I don’t want you to abandon me again,” he admitted, voice small and embarrassed.

“You think I don’t worry over the same thing?” he wondered. Will frowned at him, and Hannibal kissed his downturned lips. “I am not the same man you knew, Will. I’ve grown… used to this lifestyle. I can be vain. Arrogant. I’ve been so unhappy for most of my life that I feel that there’s nothing inside of me aside from bitterness and resentment. I worry that once you realize it, you’ll tell me to leave. Like you just did.”

“I’m sorry,” Will sighed. “I didn’t mean it. My trust issues are going to be a lot of fun for you.”

“My bitter resentment is going to be sickening,” Hannibal promised miserably.

“I’ve still been happier these last two days than I’ve been in eleven years,” Will admitted in a whisper.

The slow smile from Hannibal felt like a victory. “As have I, Will,” he sighed, pulling Will into a hug that felt all encompassing. “As have I.”

The wine was clearly getting to them, so Will began making dinner shortly afterwards. Hannibal helped him in the kitchen, chopping herbs and potatoes after being pointed in the right direction for cutting boards and knives.

It felt like no time had passed between them at all when they began cooking together. Hannibal moved around his kitchen, familiarizing himself with the layout, then worked as though he’d been doing it for years.

Their hips bumped occasionally, and a kiss was pressed to his shoulder when Hannibal reached around him to put a knife in the sink. It seemed almost as though it was done absently. Like he’d been doing just that for the last eleven years.

It felt… comfortable being here with Hannibal in this way.

“Why Wolf Trap?” he asked while cutting their potatoes in perfect little cubes.

Will shrugged. “I wanted somewhere rural, I guess. Growing up in Lombardy, I fell asleep to the sounds of crickets. I woke up because birds and heat bugs were chirping. I wanted a little piece of home, even though… it’s not really home. You know?”

“Lombardy is unlike anywhere I’ve ever been,” he agreed. “I always knew that if I ever visited again that I would never come back. Not that… not that it was ever an issue.”

“It’s different in the wintertime,” Will deflected, moving away from the topic of why Hannibal had stayed away. He knew why. He understood why. It didn’t mean that the reason didn’t hurt all the same. “Everything slows down. I used to hate it, because a lot of my friends were not from there, really. They had summer homes and vacation homes, so it was pretty lonely in the winter. Which was usually why my parents retreated to their house in Milan after Christmas and New Year’s.”

“Do they still do that?” he asked while tossing their potatoes in fresh rosemary and olive oil. The scent of it reminded Will of Italy. Of the herb garden off the terrace. Lavender and rosemary always reminded him of home.

“Not really,” Will admitted. “My Dad… he’s not been well. Gets out of breath really easily, coughs a lot. He’s got a few doctors appointments coming up, so… we’re waiting for that.”

“I hope it’s nothing serious,” he said softly. “Are you… are you going back for Christmas this year?”

Will nodded. “Three weeks, yeah.”

“Will you tell me when you know what’s wrong?” he asked softly.

Will paused while seasoning their fish, turning to find Hannibal watching him with concern. “Sure,” he nodded. “I’ll tell you.”

Hannibal gave him a grateful smile, then they returned to making their dinner.

It was absolutely delicious. Will never went to these lengths just for himself, and he wondered why that was. The potatoes were flawless. The fish cooked to flakey perfection. Even Hannibal seemed to be enjoying it, his eyes fluttering closed after a bite. “Tastes just like Italy,” he laughed.

“Mafalda still talks about it,” he chuckled. “Every single summer resident that’s come and gone since you have been told that Hannibal Lecter made her dinner once, and it was the best thing she’s ever had.”

“She is the kindest woman,” he sighed. “I think of her often.”

“She absolutely loved you,” Will smiled. “You were completely unlike anyone she’d ever met. She was very old school. Cooking and cleaning are a woman’s job, if you were to ask her. Then you came in and did laundry and cooked and did dishes,” he laughed. “She felt spoiled rotten.”

“I never like being an imposition,” Hannibal shrugged. “She did a lot for me. It was the very least I could do for her.”

“You were never an imposition on anyone,” Will promised softly. Hannibal smiled gently at that, taking a sip of his wine. “Tell me about a good memory you have since… since you left. I want to hear about something that brought you some joy.”

Hannibal seemed brought up short by the question, and he shifted uncomfortably. “I… Well, I guess the something that stands out more than others was when I volunteered at the AIDS clinic downtown,” he shrugged. “Right after I opened my private practice, I wanted to do something good, I suppose. I volunteered there for a few years, offering psychiatric help to those who needed it. I’ve never really felt like I’ve done any good in my career, aside from my time spent there.”

Will swallowed thickly, covering Hannibal’s hand with his own. “That was very kind of you to do that,” he managed. “Why did you stop?”

“It was… difficult,” he admitted. “I grew close to them. A lot of them were very young and had so very much to offer the world. None lived longer than a few years at best once they were diagnosed, and… I lost very many friends in that time. People I learned to care about. I stopped eating. I stopped sleeping. I began paying medical bills for some who couldn’t afford it, then started donating to the care shelters for end-of-life care for others. There was a young man there… Adam,” Hannibal smiled. “He reminded me of you, in a way. Stubborn. Strong. Fiercely smart. He asked me why I spent so much time around death, and… God, I had never looked at it that way. When he died, I decided to step away. For my own good. So much for doing something good, right?”

“How long did you volunteer there?” Will asked softly.

“Almost six years,” he admitted with a grimace. “Not long enough. Too long. I hate myself sometimes for stepping away, but… after Adam, I couldn’t… I couldn’t do it anymore.”

“Six years is a long time,” Will tried to reassure him. It was more than Will had ever done for anyone. It was more than most would ever do, too. “How often did you do that?”

“Five or six times a week,” Hannibal admitted. Will felt shell-shocked by the answer, and Hannibal continued. “Only an hour or two during the week after work… then for six hours or so on Saturdays.”

“How did you have time for a personal life?” Will wondered.

“I didn’t. It suited me just fine, and Bedelia was perfectly alright with my absence.”

“You’re a good man for doing what you did,” Will assured him, squeezing his hand gently. “You helped the community… our community in the only way you could.”

Hannibal smiled, though his eyes were glassy. “Our community,” he repeated with a nod, like he’d never considered it that way before Will pointed it out. Their fingers threaded together, and Will looked at their hands, memorizing them anew. They were different, now. Each of them was not exactly as they were in the sketch. Will had more callouses on his fingertips and knuckles and his fingers weren’t quite as delicate as they were when he was seventeen. Hannibal’s hands seemed broader, his cuticles and fingernails much more manicured than they were before.

Will also now wore a bracelet. One he wished were included in the sketch, because he considered it a part of him, now.

“Have you done anything you enjoyed since me, Will?”

The question startled him, and he glanced up with a raised eyebrow. “I’ve enjoyed… a lot, Hannibal. I go back to Italy every summer and winter, and I see my parents and family. There’s joy there every single time I go. We spent a Christmas in Paris one year, and that was really something to see. I’d never been there for Christmas, and it was beautiful. I haven’t been miserable, Hannibal. Just… lonely. It was impossible for me to connect to someone else after you. Nothing ever really compared.”

“You’ve not mentioned a single thing about living here,” he pointed out. “Why is that?”

“Psychoanalyzing me, Dr. Lecter?” Will huffed.

“I don’t mean to,” he said apologetically. “I can’t precisely turn it off.”

Will laughed. “I suppose you can’t.”

He waited patiently, and Will felt his shoulders rising defensively while he struggled to think of a single good thing that had happened to him since he moved to the states. He genuinely couldn’t think of a thing. “I don’t love it here,” he admitted for the first time out loud. The admission made him feel like he wanted to cry, though he held it back. “I don’t even like it, really. My dogs are the best thing that has happened to me while being here. I hate my job. I hate going to crime scenes. I hate that when I go to a bad one, I get mandatory psych-evaluations because I’ll have a fucking stress nosebleed. I just… I fucking hate it.”

“Is that why you were at Dr. Petersen’s office?” he wondered. “Stress?”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I am good at my job, Hannibal. I’ve written a few profiles that were helpful, but not… useful. We’re working in the dark all the time, trying to be one step ahead of these killers. It’s impossible. What I’ve realized is that we’re usually waiting around for another body to drop so we can learn something new. We’re literally waiting for people to die in hopes that these fucking sickos will make a mistake. I hate that, Hannibal. They leave semen, hair, fingerprints, you name it, and it’s all fucking useless. The most we can get from it is their blood type, maybe. If they’re excreters. Maybe we learn what color their hair is. It’s not enough, and we’re always a step behind.”

“I thought we were making waves with DNA evidence?” Hannibal wondered. “Doesn’t that help?”

“Sometimes,” he shrugged. “It takes almost eight weeks to do a DNA profile, but what good is it? What we need is a DNA database online. Something… I don’t know, reachable across the world. We have fingerprints, but no way to look them up. No way to know if they’ve been arrested somewhere. We can’t exactly drive to each and every police station to flip through fingerprint cards.”

“In a few years,” Hannibal said assuredly. “Things will evolve.”

“In the meantime, we’re as useless as tits on a bull,” Will chuckled ruefully. “They’re working on STR’s for DNA sequences. It would take hours instead of weeks to create a

profile of someone's DNA. It still doesn't really mean anything, yet. The most good it would do is in cases where we had a suspect, we could compare the DNA to see if it was them. Most of the serial killers we investigate… we don't have a suspect, Hannibal. How do you capture someone who kills at random?"

Hannibal considered it, sweeping his thumb gently against the inside of Will's wrist. The gentle friction soothed Will a bit, and he watched the movement as though watching a pendulum swing. "Luck," he decided.

"I've been involved on a few cases where we caught the killer," Will admitted with a shrug. "It felt… good, I guess. Most of my colleagues would be celebrating and overjoyed that we took one killer off the streets. By the time we catch them, they've sometimes killed over ten people. It feels like we catch one, and five more sickos spring up. I'm… tired of it."

Hannibal withdrew his hand from Will's grasp, then stood to come around the table. He kneeled at Will's feet, and Will swallowed thickly. "You are not bound to this career, Will," he said softly. A gentle hand cupped the side of Will's face, and he pressed his cheek into Hannibal's palm. "I was bound to my mistake. I was obligated to see it through, but you aren't. The light that I love so dearly in you has dimmed. I understand that, as any fire I had in me went out years ago. Don't ruin your own life. It's too short to spend it doing anything that you don't love to do."

Something clicked for Will, then. "That's why you stopped at the clinic," he blurted. Hannibal's eyes widened, flicking over Will's face in interest. "You were surrounded by very sick men who would have done anything for one more chance at life while you lived yours in a coma. Breathing, but not living. Married, but not loving. Working, but not thriving. You began to understand them, didn't you?"

A single tear fell from Hannibal's eye, and he dipped his face to hide it. Will gripped his chin and tipped his face up, swiping it from his cheek with his thumb. "I've forgotten what it's like to be in your presence," he said thickly.

"Sucks, doesn't it?" Will teased self-consciously.

"No," he whispered. "It feels like being seen. It feels like coming up for air after drowning for eleven years."

"It's good to be seen," he said, allowing his fingers to trail over the sharp edge of Hannibal's cheekbone.

The palm against the side of his neck gripped him a little tighter, pulling him forward as Hannibal went up on his knees. Will threaded his fingers through Hannibal's hair, gripping the back of his head while leaning forward in his seat.

Their mouths met, lips parting for one another. He smelled so good that Will inhaled greedily, licking into his mouth to savor the taste of sweet wine on his tongue. He relearned the cavern of Hannibal's mouth, which he used to know just as intimately as his own. His tongue brushed against the sharp edges of his imperfect teeth, then swept boldly against Hannibal's

own. Their bodies drifted closer as Will parted his thighs, welcoming him into the cradle of them as their hands grasped one another's faces to hold each other close.

Closer.

Will pulled away enough to suckle his top lip, flicking the plumpness of it with the tip of his tongue. Hannibal groaned, trailing his mouth to Will's jawline, dragging damp lips across day-old stubble. "I love this," he said softly, licking the stubble with the flat of his tongue. It rasped against it, like a cat licking his skin.

"Stubble?" Will chuckled.

"That you have stubble," Hannibal said breathlessly. "I love it and hate it in equal measure. I wish I knew when it happened. I wish I knew because I'd spent every day kissing this cheek since we'd met."

"My beard came in when I was… maybe nineteen?" Will smiled, closing his eyes as Hannibal kissed his teeth. "I think I was nineteen when I realized I needed to shave. Like… really shave. There are still parts of my face where it just doesn't grow in."

"Here?" he wondered while licking the spot just under his bottom lip, slightly to the right. "It's soft as silk."

"Yeah," Will chuckled, tipping his head back to let Hannibal explore. "There. Other side, too."

Hannibal's tongue immediately went to the left, too. He groaned, dragging his tongue through stubble, then soft skin where hair just wouldn't grow for some reason. "Do you have chest hair?"

Will's eyes blinked open. It was a weirdly personal question, but… they were weirdly personal with one another. "Take off my sweater and find out," he offered.

Hannibal groaned again, slipping his fingers just under the hem of Will's sweater. "Do you mean it?" he asked softly.

Will answered by raising his arms over his head, waiting for Hannibal to lift away the material. He looked as though he would pass out with the invitation, and Will bit back a smile as Hannibal lifted the sweater up and off his body.

The weight of Hannibal's eyes on his naked torso felt like a physical caress. Hesitant fingers trailed down his bare chest, then hot palms cupped his slight pectoral muscles. "My God," he breathed.

Will knew he was in shape. He worked out because it relieved some of his stress, and it helped when he needed to chase down suspects on occasion. He wasn't flat as a board anymore. He had some gentle muscle definition, which pleased him. His flat little boy chest used to cause him so much self-loathing. At least until Hannibal, anyway.

Reverent fingertips trailed over his nipples, where the barest bit of hair grew in sparsely. Chest hair was not in the cards for him, though. Beard or not. “No chest hair, really,” he shivered, arching his back into those curious fingertips. His nipple pebbled from the attention, delighting Hannibal all the more.

A firm palm cupped his pectoral muscle, squeezing the mound of flesh greedily. Hannibal’s mouth was parted, his eyes dark as night. “How are you even more beautiful than you were then? You were exquisite, and now you’re magnificent.”

“I’m just a man,” he said dismissively, making Hannibal’s eyes flash up at him.

“You are,” he agreed, sliding his palm down Will’s chest, tracing the slight definition of his abs with his fingertips. “You are most certainly a man.”

His hand stopped its descent when it reached his belt, and each of them stared at one another heavily while breathing hard. “Do you prefer me the way I am now? Or how I was, then?”

Hannibal seemed to need a minute for that question, and he waited while Hannibal stroked the soft hair that led into his slacks with his thumb. “I don’t prefer one over the other,” he said honestly, eyes sparkling when they met Will’s own. “I’m mostly angry at myself for missing the transition. For not being present when this happened,” he said, stroking his happy trail again. “Or when this happened,” he said, moving to cup his pectoral again. “I prefer you, Will. Just as you are. Just as you were. Just as you will be in twenty years. Just you.”

“I’d rather not lose you for the next twenty years,” Will admitted while dragging his fingers gently against Hannibal’s bottom lip.

“You’re not losing me again,” he promised. “Not for anything. Do you… Do you wish I was more like I was back then?”

“No,” Will smiled. “I prefer you, Hannibal. Just as you are.”

Hannibal smiled, moving his knee with a wince. “Who I am is a man who cannot stay on his knees for this long anymore,” he chuckled. “Can we clean up and move to the sofa?”

“We can put dishes in the sink and move to the sofa,” Will agreed. “We’re not doing dishes. I want your company right now.”

He came to his feet with a little crack of his knee, and he winced while rubbing it with his fingertips. “I used to run every day,” he chuckled. “It was terrible on my knees.”

Will reached for his sweater on the floor and tugged it back over his head. He was aware of Hannibal’s regard of him while doing it, could feel the weight of his eyes on his back when he turned towards the table to gather their plates. “I go jogging,” he said with a shrug. “A little easier on the knees.”

“I’ve taken up swimming,” Hannibal said absently while gathering dirty plates and silverware. “I swim laps at the gym, and it keeps me in shape. Good cardio without impact.”

“What color is your bathing suit?” Will asked with a laugh.

“Navy blue,” Hannibal grinned, following Will into the kitchen.

Will scraped their plates in the trash, pausing to look up at Hannibal with a teasing smirk. “Not red?”

“You have my red bathing suit,” Hannibal said accusingly. “Although the blue one is a little different from the ones I wore in heaven. They’re tight to reduce drag in the water.”

Will’s mouth went dry while placing plates in the sink to soak. “Tighter than the red ones were?” he asked incredulously.

“Much,” Hannibal teased, his cheeks tinging that delicious rose-gold that Will loved so much.

Will tried to imagine it. Skintight swim shorts that clung to every inch of Hannibal’s… apricot. And apricock. Jesus Christ, it was like he was seventeen again with the rampant arousal that coursed through his veins. “I should go with you one day,” Will blurted, then blushed. “What I mean is… uh, I haven’t gone swimming since this summer in Italy. It would be… nice.”

“Would it?” Hannibal chuckled, stepping into Will’s space to press him into his cabinets.

“Sure,” he breathed, dipping his eyes to that plush mouth that was lifting in a smile.

“Just because you want to… swim?”

“Sure,” he repeated. “Why else?”

Hannibal inhaled greedily, nosing at Will’s jawline like a cat. “Does the thought of swimming usually make you this aroused?”

“Sure,” he gasped, tipping his head back when Hannibal started nibbling on his throat, broad hands cupping his hipbones. “Swimming. So arousing.”

“It feels like my blood is singing when I touch you,” Hannibal breathed against his neck, raising goosebumps with his hot breath. “My desire for you hasn’t waned. Even after all this time.”

“Sex was never the issue for us,” Will pointed out, grasping the soft ends of Hannibal’s hair to tip his face for a kiss. Their lips met wetly, and Hannibal shifted forward with a soft moan.

Will’s legs parted, welcoming Hannibal’s hips to thrust against his, easing the tension that had been rising in him all evening. It was so tempting to take Hannibal to bed and ravage him, but…

He pulled away with a gasp, taking in a measured breath to calm himself down. “Sex was never the issue. It was everything else, Hannibal.”

“Forgive me,” he said with a frown. “I’m trying to be respectful that you’ve asked for some time, and… I swear, I don’t mean to pressure you. I’m sorry, I’ll just-”

Watching him flub through an awkward apology was too fucking adorable to deal with, and Will recalled how he felt the night before. How he wished he'd have had Hannibal in his bed with him, or just stayed the night with Hannibal instead.

He was sending mixed signals, he knew. There was a war within him, one that craved Hannibal like he was the very air he needed to breathe and one that wanted to punish Hannibal for leaving him in the first place. There was a part of him that wanted to spend the night mapping Hannibal's body, cataloging the changes in him so he could compare them to the flawless memories in his Mind Palace.

There was another part of him that knew he'd never, ever, recover if it didn't work out again.

He'd waited long enough. It would hurt if they separated whether he'd had Hannibal inside of him or not.

He crashed their mouths together, stopping Hannibal's apology dead in its tracks. "Bed," he pleaded breathlessly. "Upstairs, to the right."

"Will," he gasped, stumbling backwards while Will sucked the soft skin of his throat between his lips, grasping him close while pushing him in the right direction. "Will, no. You said… You said," he lost the thought when Will cupped his erection in his palm, gripping it briefly to feel the weight of him.

"I *know* what I said," he sighed, licking a path back to Hannibal's mouth where he pressed his tongue back inside, licking him boldly. "I've waited long enough for you. Don't make me wait longer."

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to law enforcement from the 80's and 90's. They didn't have jack shit to work with; no DNA, no fingerprint data base, nothing. It's incredible to me that they were able to capture anyone. Real life superheroes.

Will is sending all kinds of mixed signals, but he wants Hannibal. Next chapter is a treat. haha

I am still EXTRA behind on replying to comments. I just got a new job, and it's completely unlike anything I've done before. I literally come home and study because I am learning so many new things. I haven't written anything for fun in over a week, and I am stressed. I appreciate every single one of you. Thank you for all your kind words.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I've waited long enough for you. Don't make me wait longer."

It was a cheap shot, and he knew it the moment the words left his lips. Hannibal flinched as though he'd been slapped, guilt replacing every tentative emotion that had been on his face. "Don't," Will pleaded. "I didn't mean for that to be so cruel. I want to know you like I used to know you. That's all I meant."

Hannibal's eyes flickered over his face, and then in a split-second he was lifted, his legs around Hannibal's waist as the older man hefted him up the stairs. A laugh bellowed out of him, his arms wrapping around Hannibal's neck in an effort to hold on. "I'm not as light as I used to be," he chuckled, pressing kisses to the side of Hannibal's face as he went up the stairs.

"You're not," he laughed, hesitating by the landing while sounding a little winded. "Which door?"

"That one," he pointed.

His bed was unmade, which made him blush when Hannibal set him down on the mattress. "It smells like you in here," he said, trailing kisses down Will's throat while lifting his sweater back up his stomach. Will helped him out by pulling his sweater up and off his torso, and he was stunned to find Hannibal with his face pressed into his sheets.

"You… you want a minute alone with my bed?" he teased, going up on his elbows to watch Hannibal inhale greedily against his pillow.

Hannibal smiled bashfully, his hair mussed from Will's fingers. "Does Mafalda send you chamomile detergent, too?"

"She does," Will chuckled. "Just a tiny bottle every other month, but… it's enough to wash my bedsheets and towels. You… you remember the scent?"

"This was the exact scent of your bed in Italy," he sighed, rolling onto his back. "Your shampoo, sweat, chamomile detergent," he went on almost dreamily. "The only thing missing is coconut sunscreen."

"Not much call for that in September," Will laughed. He rolled onto his side, tugging Hannibal's sweater up his flat stomach. "Please?" he asked politely.

Hannibal grinned, lifting himself from the bed to tug his sweater up and off, throwing it off the side of the bed. Will's mouth went dry while his eyes slid over him. He was still beautiful. Jesus, so beautiful.

He pressed his fingers into his fur-covered chest, running his palm over the firm swell of his pectoral muscle. “Your chest hair makes a heart,” he announced.

“I… I’m sorry?”

“A *heart*,” he repeated, trailing his fingertip against the fur, following the path where it tapered out to smooth skin. “Was it like this then, too? Did I not notice?”

Hannibal shook his head. “I’ve gotten… a bit more hair since then. Here,” he said, trailing the hair along his stomach where the heart made its sweet little point. “Is it… do you like it?”

“I want to lick it,” Will laughed, rolling over until he could straddle Hannibal’s thighs. The older man was still under him, letting Will reacquaint himself with his body. He wanted to lick, so he licked, trailing his tongue against the grain of his chest hair, savoring the musky taste of his skin as well as the rough rasp of it against his tongue. His lips sucked around the hardened nub of his nipple, and he flicked the flesh with the tip of his tongue, biting down on it gently.

Hannibal hissed under him, his hands finally moving to touch Will’s face and lace through his hair. “I never thought I would have this again,” he whispered.

His admission almost moved Will to tears, which he hid by placing his ear over Hannibal’s heart. It thrummed in his chest, quickening when Will’s fingers splayed over his sternum. “Likewise,” he admitted in a hushed breath.

“Can I kiss you?” he asked after a few beats of tense silence.

It reminded Will of the night they’d first made love all those years ago. He asked it in the same uncertain way. The same inflection of self-doubt.

“Yes,” he said thickly, going up on his elbows to bring his mouth to Hannibal’s own.

The kiss started off sweet and languid, but quickly evolved into something lush and deep. Hannibal’s tongue slipped into his mouth, his hands gripping Will’s jawline so he could angle the kiss as he wanted.

When he was seventeen, he allowed Hannibal to commandeer their kiss however he wanted it. At twenty-eight, he had his own opinions on how it should go.

He leaned away until their mouths were barely touching, licking Hannibal’s top lip, then his bottom lip. They were still petal soft and sweet, so he suckled his top lip between his teeth, biting down gently.

Hannibal made a soft sound in response, his eyes fluttering shut while he allowed Will to take as he pleased. His hands cautiously trailed down Will’s bare spine, tracing the curve of his waist as though Will might tell him to stop.

He had no intention of stopping him.

Getting their pants off was an issue all on its own, as neither of them wanted to part their mouths for even the few seconds it would take to get them off. It was unavoidable, and they laughed while kicking their pants and underwear from the side of the bed.

The moment they were blessedly naked, Hannibal rolled him until Will was under him. His eyes were alight with desire, trailing over Will's bare body as if it were the first time he'd seen it. In a lot of ways, it was.

"You… you're…" Hannibal clearly had no idea how to finish his thought, but Will knew exactly where he was going with it.

"I wasn't done growing at seventeen," Will pointed out while inching his thighs higher around Hannibal's narrow waist. He'd grown three inches in the space of a year and a half, and he'd grown… everywhere else as well. It wasn't something that Will consciously noticed until he realized one day that his hand didn't engulf his cock when he was masturbating anymore.

He blushed as he realized… when he and Hannibal were intimate, he must have been *small*.

That wasn't the case, anymore.

"Sex with me must have been terrible," he said self-consciously.

Hannibal's eyes flashed up at him and he shook his head. "It was incredible, Will. Forgive me, it just… didn't occur to me that I was intimate with you before you'd finished… growing." There was a hint of self-loathing in his voice at the admission.

He hissed when Hannibal aligned their erections, pressing them together deliciously. There wasn't much difference between them anymore, aside from maybe their girth. Will's was thinner, but not by much.

"Look at us," Hannibal implored, reddened mouth parted while watching them slide together.

Will was looking. He could do nothing but look. Hannibal's abdominal muscles flexed with each little roll of his hips. Their cocks, that looked and felt fucking perfect together. He was enraptured by Hannibal's arms. The flex of his biceps as he held Will's hips to steady him while they compared the subtle differences in their bodies.

Hannibal wasn't all that different from how he was back then. If anything, he'd only grown more beautiful. There were a few strands of gray in his chest hair, now. A few fine lines around his eyes. Otherwise, he stepped out of a time capsule, preserved and unchanged for the last eleven years.

"I've missed you," Will admitted softly. He felt overwhelmed having Hannibal so near again, when he never thought he would see him again.

Hannibal released them from his grip, reaching up to cup Will's face in his hand. His eyes glistened while his throat constricted with a rough swallow. "I have missed you, too."

Will leaned forward to capture his mouth in another kiss, shuddering when Hannibal's fingers trailed down his bare spine. "I don't have condoms," he said regretfully. "I don't… I haven't slept with anyone in years."

"Neither have I," Hannibal promised softly. "If you don't feel comfortable, we can wait until we have… what we need. Perhaps we could get tested beforehand."

"I… I trust you, Hannibal," he sighed. "I was tested shortly after Margot, which was about two years ago, now. I was clean then. There has been no one since."

He winced. "It's been significantly longer than that for me."

"Make love to me, then," Will asked softly, voice breaking with emotion. He wanted this. God, did he want this.

From Hannibal's full-bodied shiver, he wasn't the only one. "Will," he breathed.

He'd dreamed of this so often there was a part of him that doubted it was real. Hannibal touched him as though he couldn't believe this was happening, either. Gentle fingers caressed his skin while those dark eyes of his didn't seem to know where to settle. "What you need is in the nightstand," he offered softly.

Hannibal reached over and opened the drawer, withdrawing Will's almost-empty, small, bottle of lube. He looked nauseated while holding it, and Will felt like he could understand that. "It's only me that's used it," he promised gently. "It's… it's for me."

All the tension in Hannibal's face smoothed out. "Forgive me," he sighed. "I've no right at all to-"

"It's alright," Will promised while reaching up to touch the high arch of a perfect cheekbone. "It's alright."

Hannibal leaned forward and kissed him, easing some of the mounting tension between them. He was as nervous now as he was during their first time. In a lot of ways, it was going to be like their first time.

Kisses trailed down the side of his face, then the side of his neck. He tilted his head back to make room for him, smiling when he felt the flat of Hannibal's tongue lick over his Adam's apple. It still fascinated him, even after all this time.

Will spread his legs wider in invitation, hiking them up Hannibal's narrow waist. The skin over his ribs and back was smooth as silk against Will's fingers. Hannibal leaned away a bit, clicking the cap of the lube open to slicken his fingers and Will touched his wrist. "Go slow," he requested softly. "You're the last one that's… uh, been inside of me."

His face felt wildly hot as Hannibal stared down at him in shock. "No one else…?"

Will had to look away from the intensity in his gaze. "No one else."

He'd had other lovers, yes. With Antony, there were a few times where Will considered it. The few times he said yes, Antony would rarely get any further than touching him there before Will would panic and take it back.

Antony was always understanding. A few of his other lovers in college were not. His complete refusal to reverse roles ended a few relationships along the way, not that he mourned them when they were gone.

He wanted Hannibal to be his last, plain and simple. He wanted Hannibal to be the only one who knew him that way. He generally was not the kind of person who let people in easily, never mind letting someone into his own body. That right had and would only be Hannibal's.

There was a part of him that expected to flinch when he felt slick fingers touch him between his cheeks. They circled him slowly, allowing him to refuse it if he wanted to. There was a knot of mounting tension in his chest, and he gripped Hannibal's biceps while his heart fluttered wildly behind his ribs.

"Breathe," Hannibal pleaded.

Their eyes met, and any tension he was feeling dissipated. Hannibal's eyes shone down on him with so much reverent devotion that Will's own eyes welled with tears in response. He gripped Hannibal's jawline, arching up into a devastating kiss just as Hannibal pressed his finger inside of him.

The world around them melted away, and it was just them. Just this.

The scent of him, heady and spicy. The taste of him, sweet from wine and salty from sweat. The feel of his chest hair pressed against Will's chest. The rasp of stubble against their faces.

The feel of a single finger, taking him apart and putting him back together again.

"Will," Hannibal sighed, breaking their kiss to press his nose against the pulse point of Will's throat. He felt another finger slide inside of him, Hannibal's other hand bracing his leg and massaging his thigh.

It felt differently than it had in the past, but in a good way. There wasn't a time limit on them anymore. Hannibal wasn't leaving. They were the sum of six weeks spent together and then eleven years spent apart, but time had no bearing on them anymore.

Time had no bearing on their love for one another.

Will kissed him, slamming his eyes shut until the tears that had built spilled over his cheeks. The kiss was desperately rough, and Hannibal groaned while returning Will's fervor. A hot tear cut a track down Will's cheek to the corner of their mouths, and Hannibal pulled away while licking his lips. His own eyes were glassy as he wiped the stray tear from Will's cheek with his thumb. "Will," he whispered reverently.

"Hannibal, please," he gasped, voice thick with emotion. "Please."

Hannibal nodded while withdrawing his fingers from Will's body, leaving Will feeling carved open and empty. He watched Hannibal slick himself with more lube before pressing against Will's rim. Their eyes met while Will held his jaw in his hands, and then Hannibal was sliding inside of him.

The burning stretch was almost overbearing. It had been eleven years since anyone had been inside of him. Since Hannibal had been inside of him. He'd forgotten what it felt like; that warm, heavy, ache in his guts as Hannibal made room for himself inside of Will's body.

Gentle fingers carded through his hair while Hannibal watched Will's face. His mouth was parted in awe, his eyes wide and glassy with unshed tears. He felt Hannibal's pelvis press against his body, signaling that the love of his life was as far inside of him as he could be.

They breathed the same air while Hannibal gave him time to acclimate. They kissed gently, eyes closing in relief while reacquainting with one another. That familiar current passed between them, making Will feel like his skin was tingling where they touched.

When he began moving, Will's body tensed up from the intensity of it. Every movement Hannibal made ignited a fire in him, warm pleasure pooling low in his belly. He touched the strong curve of Hannibal's shoulder with his lips, then his fingers. Hannibal kissed his throat, then his jawline, his fingertips trailing over Will's ribcage.

"Hannibal," Will sighed, tilting his face into the safety of Hannibal's throat where he could breathe him in.

"My beloved," Hannibal whispered while pressing as deeply into him as he possibly could.

It felt overwhelming. There was pleasure as there always was, but there was also pain. Now that Will had him again, he didn't know how he'd survived eleven years without him. He'd been living with half of himself missing, never realizing it fully until this very moment. His body missed Hannibal. His heart missed Hannibal.

He missed Hannibal. They were one and the same.

His back arched from the bed as Hannibal gripped him in his palm, stroking him in time with his slow, deep, thrusts. A startled moan spilled past his lips, and Hannibal kissed his neck as if in thanks for the desperate sound.

He couldn't last like this; the pleasure was too great. His body felt too alive and too responsive. He felt on the verge of something catastrophic; like his heart was about to shatter in his chest.

He clawed Hannibal closer, wrapping his arms around his neck while a muffled sob escaped his mouth. He came between them while holding Hannibal tight, his fingers tangled in his hair in a death grip.

Hannibal shuddered against him, snapping his hips roughly as he came deep inside of Will while he constricted around him, pulsing in time with his own orgasm.

They held one another close, eyes drifting over one another's faces as if in shock. It seemed that they'd both forgotten what it was like, even if they remembered it was incredible.

"Are you alright, Will?" he asked softly.

Will nodded, shocked to find that his cheeks were wet with tears. He held Hannibal tighter even as he pulled away to wipe at the tears on his cheeks. "I think… I think I forgot what it was like to touch you. To have you like this," he admitted. "I'm not… I don't regret this. If anything, I'm… relieved. It feels like I can breathe again."

Hannibal withdrew from him gently, rolling to his side where he tucked Wil close against his chest. Will could hear his heartbeat against his ear, and he closed his eyes while savoring the sound of it. "Can you ever forgive me for leaving you?" he asked after a few beats of silence.

Will could feel his hands trembling as Hannibal held him, and he knew in that moment that Hannibal was just as afraid as Will was. He wanted to say that he already had forgiven him. He wanted to say that there was nothing to forgive, which was not precisely true, either. "I will learn to, if you let me," Will said, which was as honest of a thing as he could say in that moment.

He was squeezed tighter as Hannibal let out a disbelieving breath. "I don't deserve you."

"Don't say that," Will huffed. "It's not about deserving things. Love isn't given because a person deserves it. It's not a prize. I loved you when you deserved it, and even when you didn't. I've never regretted loving you, Hannibal. Do you understand? Not for a moment."

"You've always been wise beyond your years," he said softly while tugging his shaking fingers through Will's curls.

Silence descended between them again, each touching one another softly, relearning one another's bodies after all those empty years. "Where do we go from here?" Will asked.

"I don't want to live a life without you in it," Hannibal replied immediately, pressing a sweet kiss against Will's cheek. "I don't care what we do, so long as we do it together." It made him smile, and Hannibal pressed a kiss against his teeth. "I missed this smile of yours."

His blush was unavoidable. "I've smiled before this."

"True," Hannibal agreed, kissing his mouth again. "I didn't get to kiss it, though."

Will laughed, leaning forward until their foreheads touched. They were breathing the same air between them, which was its own separate pleasure from the feel of his skin against Will's fingertips. "Stay with me tonight?" he asked softly. "Please?"

"Of course," came the immediate response. A kiss was pressed to his temple as Hannibal inhaled against his skin. "I'll need you to set an alarm for me, though."

"I can do that," Will promised. He pulled away from Hannibal regretfully, sitting up in the bed with a wince. He could feel Hannibal leaking from his body, the soreness that ached as he

sat up. “I’m going to put my dogs outside one more time before bed and get them their dinner. I… I will be right back.”

Hannibal sat up immediately as well, glancing around for his underwear. “I’ll come with you,” he offered.

The nights were getting brisk as summer finally relented to autumn. They sat on his wicker loveseat, watching his dogs play in the yard in the early cover of darkness. The moon rose behind the trees, huge and golden in the sky.

Will felt like an exposed nerve. Everything ached. Everything felt like too much. Even Hannibal’s thigh resting against his own felt like too much, though he didn’t pull away from the chaste contact. “Are you alright?” Hannibal asked cautiously.

“Yeah,” Will nodded, arms crossed over his chest as though he were holding himself together. “Just… overwhelmed, I think. Did you remember how intense it was between us?”

Hannibal smiled while watching Buster aggressively attack a tuft of grass. “Truthfully?” Hannibal wondered, and Will nodded. “I had forgotten. Or more accurately, I had forced myself to forget.”

“Why?” Will asked with a frown.

Hannibal grimaced while toeing a squeaky floorboard on his deck. “I doubt you’d want to hear it.”

“Tell me,” Will demanded. “Please?”

He sighed, turning his face away to watch the moon crest over the treetops. “When I married Bedelia,” he said slowly, voice heavy with regret. “We were intimate a few times a week. It was… dreadful. It wasn’t… I tried, Will. God, did I try. I thought that if this was to be my life, then I would do my best to make the best of it. It was… miserable. There was no connection between us. We rarely even kissed…”

He seemed to need a minute, and Will agreed with that. Hearing about their intimacy, if you could call it that, was not anything Will wanted to hear about. Still, he tried his best to listen and set aside the blades of jealousy that were slashing at his heart.

“Then I met Tim,” he said with a shrug. “I am not… proud that I was unfaithful to her. I just… I kept comparing our intimacy to what you and I had, and I wondered if it was lacking because she was… well, a she. Even with Tim, it… lacked. There was always something missing. That… zing between us. I know you understand what I mean?” he wondered.

Will nodded. “I’ve never found that with anyone but you.”

Hannibal nodded, too. “In my desperation to move on from you, I reasoned that it couldn’t have been as incredible as it was between us. I figured I had rose-tinted it in some way. I know now that I did not. What we have is… something other. Rare. I should have emptied

my accounts and returned to you. Gone away with you where no one would find us. I truly am a coward."

"You're here now," Will placated him gently. "You did the best you could. If we're going to move on from this, you need to forgive yourself, first. We will never build anything worthwhile if you can't do that."

"I'll do my best," Hannibal promised, smiling weakly while threading their icy fingers together. "I promise to give you my best from now on. The same way that you've always done for me."

Will snorted through a laugh. "You weren't wrong all those years ago, you know," he offered. Hannibal arched an eyebrow at him, and Will shrugged. "I was a teenager, Han. I was… mercurial and impulsive. I had a lot of growing up to do, even if I didn't realize it at the time. You weren't entirely wrong for letting me go in the first place."

"Will, there was nothing wrong with you," Hannibal sighed. "I said your age was an issue because I knew we'd be separated for the better part of five years. I doubted you. I doubted us. I never dared to imagine I was enough to hold the interest of such a beautiful boy for all that time. I had… have?... self esteem issues. I never believe I'm good enough. The issue was never you, beloved. Your age had nothing to do with it."

A few of Will's dogs joined them on the porch once they'd tuckered themselves out in the yard, and Hannibal reached out to pet Max, who'd put his head on Hannibal's knee. Hannibal's admission made Will angry, though it was something he'd suspected even back then. The way he was raised was likely part of the reason why Hannibal had such immense self esteem issues. Will couldn't imagine what it would be like to have parents that never thought he was good enough.

He withheld his bitter retort because Hannibal had been put down enough in his life. "You're good enough," Will promised softly. "You're wonderful, Hannibal." The sharp, wounded, breath that Hannibal exhaled surprised him, and he wiggled closer to rest his head against Hannibal's shoulder. "You're wonderful."

Hannibal held him as though he were made of blown glass, pressing a kiss against his temple.

There was a part of him that assumed it would be awkward to climb back into bed together, but he'd been wrong. They slid into their usual sides of the bed, then immediately rolled towards the center. Each wore their boxers and nothing else. Hannibal's arms banded around him as he rested his face against Hannibal's chest, their legs entwined beneath his blankets.

It was as though no time had passed. As though they'd done this exact thing for eleven years.

Sleep never came easily for Will, but with the scent of Hannibal against his nose, his heartbeat under his ear, and his fingers trailing his bare spine, he found his eyelids were heavy. Hannibal breathed him in, ruffling his curls with his deep breath, and he drifted to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hello darlings!

SO after doing a bit of research for this story, I learned a few things. Apparently, boys go through puberty for almost 4 years. Sometimes, in certain cases, they can grow and change until they're 21. Quid pro quo, penises don't finish growing until about a year after puberty.

If Will didn't have facial hair yet, I reasoned it was likely he hadn't finished growing. What a weird thing to Google, but whatever. It's done.

I've Googled some strange shit for this story, haha.

I am still behind on comments, but I promise PROMISE I will reply. Starting this new job while simultaneously working per diem at my old job to train someone new has WIPED me out. To quote Bilbo Baggins, 'I feel spread too thin. Like butter that's been scraped across too much bread.'

Your comments and feedback are so SO appreciated though. Thank you guys. <3

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's alarm went off sooner than either of them would have liked, and Will slapped it off with a miserable groan. He'd slept better than he had in years, even with Hannibal wrapped around him like a living blanket.

He smiled drowsily as Hannibal pressed sleepy kisses down his throat, his warm hands holding Will's hips. "Good morning," he said between damp kisses down Will's chest.

"What a good morning it is," he chuckled, eyes still closed and heavy with sleep. He threaded his fingers through Hannibal's hair as the older man kissed his way down Will's body, cupping his morning erection in his palm.

Time was of the essence, so Hannibal wasted none of it. In the span of a mere few minutes, he had Will's boxer shorts hooked behind his balls, his fist wrapped firmly around Will's cock. Will gasped as hot, wet, heat engulfed him, sucking him as though Hannibal was starving for him.

One of Hannibal's hands gripped his shaft as he sucked him, his other sneaking up his bare chest to pluck at his nipple. Will arched up into it, flushing with arousal, pressing himself further down Hannibal's eager throat.

It felt incredible. Hannibal knew what he liked. *Remembered* what he liked, even after all this time. He watched as Hannibal opened his mouth, rolling the head of his cock against his glistening tongue. A stab of sheer *want* ricocheted through him at the sight, his head falling back against the pillow with a low moan.

Hannibal swallowed him again, his moan vibrating through Will's body, right to his back teeth. He gripped Hannibal's hair with a hiss, thrusting up into his mouth while Hannibal sucked him harder. Deeper.

Will's toes curled in the sheets as Hannibal cupped his balls, and that was all it took. He came with a gasp, and Hannibal swallowed everything Will had to give him.

His heart was still slamming in his ribs while Hannibal licked him clean, trailing kisses back up his heaving chest. His eyes glinted with amused pleasure, his chest hair tickling Will as their chests brushed together. "Let me," Will offered, reaching for Hannibal's thick length in his boxers.

Hannibal tilted his hips away. "Another time," he promised. "I have to head home to get ready for work."

Will snatched him close for a kiss, licking into his mouth that tasted of Will and nothing else. Hannibal moaned into the kiss, holding Will close against his body. "I'll owe you," Will

grinned.

“You owe me nothing,” he whispered, then pressed one more kiss to Will’s lips before climbing from the bed.

He felt almost too sated to move, but he forced himself to sit up in bed all the same. He watched Hannibal get dressed in the early morning dawn, appreciating his form before he covered it in fabric. “When will I see you again?” he asked. The question made him blush in shame for how needy it sounded.

“Tonight?” Hannibal asked with a laugh. “Is that too soon?”

“No,” Will grinned. “I can come to you after work? Would that be alright?”

Hannibal leaned over the bed to kiss him again, threading his fingers through Will’s hair to tip his face up. Will smiled into the kiss, cupping Hannibal’s jaw to keep him close. “Perfect,” he promised. “I’ll be home shortly after four.”

“I work till five, but I’ll head straight there after work,” Will promised. Hannibal made his way to the bedroom door, patting his pocket to make sure he had his wallet. “Hannibal?”

“Yes, beloved?”

“I can’t wait to see you.”

Hannibal’s smile was brighter than the rising sun. “I can’t wait to see you, either. Till tonight, Will.”

Will listened as he headed downstairs, then listened for the door opening and closing behind him before flopping back against his sheets with a wide smile.

“So?”

Will sighed while making himself a cup of much-needed coffee in the breakroom. He’d avoided Alana all morning, so he knew this confrontation was coming. “So what?” he chuckled.

“So did he end up going by yesterday, or…?” she asked, nudging his shoulder just as he tipped the coffee pot towards his cup. He fixed a glare at her and she blushed.

“He did,” he said vaguely, stepping away to pour himself his coffee. She’d come too close to spilling the caffeine. Far, far, too close.

“Okay. You don’t want to tell me about it, then. That’s fine.”

It didn’t sound like it was fine, and Will sighed while moving to the table to sit down. He sat down carefully, as he was… slightly more than sore after their lovemaking. It had truly been a very, very, long time.

Of course, Alana noticed. “He spent the night?”

“Yep,” Will nodded, sipping his mediocre coffee with his eyes closed.

He heard her pouring herself a cup, then opened his eyes as she dragged the chair out next to him to sit down beside him. “I have questions.”

He chuckled, glancing at her with a raised eyebrow. “I’m sure you do.”

“Did you move here from Italy to… find him?” she wondered.

He shook his head. “I came here to join the FBI. You know that.”

“Graham isn’t an Italian last name,” she added as an afterthought.

“My dad was born and raised in New Orleans,” he replied, grimacing while plucking a coffee grind off his tongue. “My mom is Italian and French. He met her while she was visiting there, and they moved to Italy where she owned an orchard in Lombardy and a villa in Milan.”

“Your dad is professor Graham? The archaeologist?”

Will nodded. “I feel like you knew that?”

“I didn’t,” she chuckled. “You don’t say much about… well, anything. I don’t know anything about you.”

“I’m a private person,” he said defensively.

“Clearly,” she laughed. “So… you met him eleven years ago when you were seventeen. Were you… in love?”

“Yes,” he admitted awkwardly. “Yes, we were. Are?”

“Are?”

“I still love him,” he admitted softly. “I’ve never stopped loving him.”

“The two of you couldn’t be more… different,” she said slowly.

Will wanted to tell her that she didn’t know him, but… that would be rude to say, probably. “We were very alike at one time. We will always have… similarities. He’s a very private person, too.”

“I guess,” she said after a sip of her coffee. “I’m sorry I said I wanted to… make a pass at him. I didn’t realize…”

“It’s alright,” he said, even though it kind of wasn’t. “If there’s anyone who understands his appeal, it’s me.”

She watched him for a few moments, smiling gently. “I’m glad I asked you to come to dinner. I’m glad you found one another again.”

“I didn’t realize either, you know. You never mentioned whose house we were going to, and if you would have, I would likely have not gone with you. So I think I should thank you? Thank you, Alana.”

“Don’t thank me just yet,” she laughed. “I’m kind of bitter about having two lovely men taken off my plate at the same time.”

“One of those lovely men being me?” Will asked with a disbelieving laugh.

“Obviously,” she grinned, reaching out to tuck a curl back from his forehead. “No, but… seriously. I’m… I’m happy for you, Will. I’ve never seen you happy, and… I love seeing it.”

He smiled in response, hiding it behind his paper coffee cup. “You want to come by this weekend? Take the dogs for a walk with me?”

“I’d love that,” she smiled. “I’ll bring Applesauce.”

“Winston would be devastated if you didn’t bring his girlfriend,” Will laughed. “It’s a date, then.”

“For Winston and Applesauce,” she agreed with a giggle.

Jack came to see him after lunch, which only made him feel guilty. His boss wanted him cleared for fieldwork, which didn’t seem like it would be happening any time soon with Dr. Petersen. He had another appointment scheduled for the next day, but it didn’t change that he was utterly useless for Jack in the meantime.

In truth, Will liked when he was sidelined. He loved spending his days with his students, then heading home with the knowledge that he wouldn’t be called in the middle of the night to go to a scene. He liked having his free time to himself, spending time with his dogs and transcribing his music.

“What’s his estimate on how long it’s going to take for you to be cleared?” Jack asked impatiently.

Will shrugged, avoiding eye contact by straightening a pile of student essays. “We haven’t even spoken about that yet. It’s… it’s been two sessions, Jack.”

Jack’s jaw worked back and forth as if he were trying not to yell. “Okay, well then what are you doing to get yourself cleared? Did he give you exercises or… I don’t know, things to work on at home?”

“It doesn’t… it doesn’t work like that,” Will sighed.

It made matters worse when right in the middle of his meeting with Jack, someone knocked on his office door. “Sorry,” he said to his boss. “Probably a student that has a question. Just a sec.”

It took him a few seconds to understand what he was looking at when he opened the door, as the only thing he could see was an enormous floral arrangement composed of red roses and white lilies. The delivery person was completely blinded by the ridiculous thing, and Will blushed when he hefted it to the side. “Will Graham?” he asked.

Will nodded, accepting the arrangement from the man with a wince. It weighed a ton and was *well* over two feet wide. “Delivery for you,” he chuckled. “Never delivered an arrangement that big. Good for you, man.”

“Thanks,” Will mumbled, blushing so hard his ears felt hot.

He kicked the door closed, moving to his desk to set the enormous thing down. It was big enough that he couldn’t see Jack through it, which was probably a good thing. “Taking the time to date during your restriction, I see.”

“Jack,” Will sighed, moving away from the enormous arrangement enough that he could see his boss again. He did not look amused.

He stood from the chair, jaw set firmly while crossing his arms. “Spend less time on your love life, and get yourself straightened out. We need you, Will.”

Jack left his office without a backwards glance, and he fumed silently. Spend *less* time on his love life? It had been nonexistent before finding Hannibal again this weekend, and he wouldn’t set Hannibal on the backburner for anything.

Not anything. Work included.

Yes, the arrangement was… *much*. He turned to take it in again, chuckling to himself over the… extravagance of it. Every flower was perfectly chosen. The roses were deep, velvety, red. The lilies were flawless, unblemished, white. There had to be two dozen of each of them, not that Will was about to count them.

Lost in the shrubbery was a small, white, envelope. Will withdrew it with a blush staining his cheeks.

‘My beloved Will,

For eternity I will spend making you believe,
You are the sole reason that I breathe.
My life is yours, my hopes and desires too.
Until my dying day, my heart is reserved just for you.

All my love,
Hannibal’

He had no idea what to say about any of it. There was a very bitter, very cynical, part of him that resented the romance of it. It was an involuntary response, not how he really felt. He’d

spent the better part of eleven years believing that love was a joke that he didn't find funny, but *this*…

The little letter went blurry with his tears, and he swiped them away with an embarrassed chuckle. No one had ever sent him flowers. No one.

Hannibal sent him flowers. Flowers, with a card and a bit of poetry that made his heart slam in his ribs.

Every single one of their interactions until this point had been done in secret. There were no flowers, no public declarations of love. This… this outlandish floral arrangement seemed to be a bookend for that part of their lives. They were free now to express themselves. Free to be open about who they were, and whom they loved.

Sure, the world was still conservative about their preferences. They couldn't exactly kiss on the street or get married. They could send flowers. They could possibly hold hands.

Their friends could know that they were together. His parents… his parents could know.

Will thought it felt like when he withdrew a crisp, new, sheet of staff paper for a composition. The blank page. The blank staff. The endless potential of its snow-white barrenness.

That sheet could be anything Will made it out to be. This relationship… Hannibal. It could be anything they wanted it to be.

At the end of his day, he stared at the arrangement, trying to decide what to do with it. There was a part of him that liked the idea of looking at it while he was at work, and there was another part of him that wanted it in his home. Living proof of Hannibal's love for him, filling his house with their sweet scent.

Of course, Alana found him in the halls, wrestling the giant vase into the elevator with him. She laughed and held the door to make his life easier, whistling after joining him inside. "That's so romantic," she sighed.

"Jack didn't think so," Will said, trying his best to shift the massive arrangement around so he could see her. It was nearly impossible. "Said I should worry less about my love life and more about getting back in the field."

There was silence for a few seconds, and he wished he could see her face clearly through the shrubbery of his flowers. "I can't even express how much I disagree with that statement," she said eventually. "You deserve this, Will. Going to scenes… it's not good for you. This… this is, though."

"Don't worry," he said as they climbed from the elevator. She steered him around a group of people that he couldn't see by holding his elbow. "I have absolutely no intention of setting Hannibal on the backburner for anything, Alana."

"Good," she chuckled while navigating him out to the parking lot.

With his floral arrangement safely tucked into the backseat, he headed off to Hannibal's house.

Hannibal answered the door for him with a beaming smile, and Will immediately pressed him back into the house, slamming the door closed with his foot. Hannibal's eyes widened as Will pressed him into the wall of the foyer, dragging his mouth in for a kiss that made his toes curl in his shoes.

His sweater was soft against Will's fingers, the scent of him utterly masculine and delicious. He tasted of a sweet wine that he had clearly been drinking before Will's arrival, and he sucked on his tongue to get to Hannibal's taste buried under it.

Hannibal moaned, arching into Will's body as he reacted to the older man's proximity. "Will," he said almost as though he wanted to get his attention for something. Little did he know, he had all of Will's attention.

"You sent me flowers," Will moaned, kissing wetly down the long column of his throat while curling his fingers around his narrow waist. "Beautiful flowers."

"I did," Hannibal agreed breathlessly, tipping his head back as Will sucked against his Adam's apple. "Will, wait. There's-"

"Nice to see you again," called an amused, breathy, voice by the entrance to the kitchen.

Will yanked away from him immediately, his blush creeping towards his hairline as Bedelia raised an eyebrow at the both of them. "Sorry," he said automatically. "God, so sorry."

"For what are you apologizing?" she wondered. "I'll be in the kitchen, Hannibal."

"We will join you momentarily," he promised. Neither one of them were in a state to be walking anywhere, just then.

"I can go," Will blurted. "I… If you're in the middle of something-"

"Will," Hannibal interjected. "Stay, please. She came with a check for the houses that I signed over to her. That's all. I'm making dinner for you and I, and she'll be going shortly. Alright?"

Hannibal pressed a kiss to his cheekbone as he sighed, then they headed into the kitchen. It smelled like garlic and butter, roasted meat, and the remnants of something he must have made for dessert. Sweet and decadent, like chocolate, maybe.

Bedelia was sitting at the kitchen island with a glass of pink wine in front of her. Her golden hair was styled as though she were in the fifties, her fitted black pencil skirt and emerald green, silk, top, perfectly complimenting her skin and eyes.

She was breathtaking.

“Will,” she said pleasantly, reaching for his hand with her own perfectly manicured one. “Such a pleasure to meet you again.”

He took her hand in his, avoiding eye contact as much as possible. “Likewise.”

“Forgive my intrusion on your evening together,” she requested politely. “Hannibal is being unreasonable.”

“It could be a while, then,” Will laughed.

Hannibal looked indignant while Bedelia’s breathy laugh echoed in the room. “Finally, someone who understands.” She turned back to Hannibal, tipping her jaw up at him haughtily. “We bought these homes together during our marriage. The money was as much yours as it was mine. Take the check, Hannibal.”

“Our marriage,” Hannibal began.

“Was as much a ruse for me as it was for you,” she finished. “Both of us are to blame for the lives that we’ve led until this point. Take the check, Hannibal. If you don’t, I will come here every day with my cats and set them loose on your furniture.”

Will laughed when Hannibal blanched. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“Would I not?” she asked with a smile while raising her wine glass to her lips.

“That check is much, much, more than the price of half of both houses,” he said after a beat.

“It is,” she agreed. “I sold the home in the Hamptons for over twice what we paid for it six years ago. The home in Spain was almost three times what we paid for it. Equity, darling.”

“I do not need a check this… gratuitous,” he said while sauteing something delicious in a fry pan.

“Do you believe that I do?” she wondered. “Take it, Hannibal. Do what you want with it. Donate it, for all I care. I don’t blame you for us, do you understand?”

Hannibal let out an annoyed sigh, staring at her intensely for a few moments. “I understand.”

“You’ll take the check?”

“Yes,” he sighed again.

“And deposit it?” she clarified.

“Yes,” he sighed like a martyr.

“Will is good for your disposition,” she chirped merrily. “Far less disagreeable.” Hannibal opened his mouth to say something, but she turned to Will while patting the seat by her side.

“Come. Tell me about yourself, darling.”

She left no room for argument, and Will found himself doing exactly as she requested.

She ended up staying for dinner because she and Will somehow, unreasonably, hit it off. “Seven dogs!” she laughed, glancing at Hannibal with a raised eyebrow. “I have six cats, but one is about to have a litter.”

“How do you let them go afterwards?” Will wondered after a bite of perfectly cooked steak. “I don’t think I could let puppies go.”

“It’s immensely difficult,” she agreed. “Though, I confess that I have six because I have no impulse control. Chiyoh doesn’t help matters; she allows me whatever whim I desire. I fear we’ll need to move soon because our cats will take over the house.”

“You’d move because you need more room for *cats*?” Hannibal asked incredulously.

“You have no backyard,” she said offhandedly. “Where will seven dogs run free, I wonder?”

Will choked on his sip of wine while Hannibal looked immensely, perversely, thoughtful. “A little early to be wondering about that, I think,” Will said thickly.

“She’s not wrong,” Hannibal realized.

“I love my house,” Will countered immediately. “It’s… well, perfect for me.”

“Forgive me,” she sighed. “I never meant to cause a rift.”

“No, no, it’s fine,” Will promised. “No rift. I just… it’s soon to talk about that.”

“Hannibal told me that you play the piano exquisitely,” she said, changing the subject. “Would you play for me?”

“Sure,” Will agreed while cutting into his steak again.

Hannibal’s pensive mood soaked into Will’s skin, though. It had offended him that Will was not ready to move in together, though it seriously shouldn’t have. This was day *three*, for God’s sake. Three days.

A shrill sound cut the air, and Bedelia blushed while reaching for her purse. “Forgive me,” she pleaded while withdrawing a cell phone from her bag. Will didn’t know anyone who had a cell phone, yet. Although, the bureau was considering getting them for field agents.

She stood from the table and walked over to the foyer for privacy, but her conversation was still blatantly heard. “I’m still here,” she said. “I stayed for dinner…”

“Will is here,” she chirped. “I know!”

“He’s lovely, and I’ll tell you all about him when I get home,” she said while Will blushed and shot a glance at Hannibal.

“I can’t ask him that!” she laughed, and it sounded like she tried to muffle it with her fingers. “My God, Chiyoh. Alright. I’ll be leaving shortly. *Aishiteru*,” she said softly.

“How is Chiyoh?” Hannibal asked.

“She’s lovely as ever,” she smiled while settling back in her seat. “She very much wants to meet you.”

“*Me*?” Will asked in disbelief.

“Who else?” she smiled. “I understand how strange and uncomfortable this must be for you, but… I truly do love Hannibal. He’s been my best friend since I was in high school, and I’ve only ever wanted him to be happy. You make him happy, Will. I wish our circumstances were different.”

“As do I,” Will agreed under his breath.

“Someday, the world will be a different place,” she decided. “At some point, people like us won’t have to hide our love for one another. We will be free and open to love who we want. We can’t keep hiding, though. If we want a future like that, we have to be proud of who we are. Be the brave ones that begin the movement in the right direction.”

“Agreed,” Hannibal said softly while reaching to thread he and Will’s fingers together.

Will gripped his hand gratefully, raising their knuckles to press a kiss against Hannibal’s fingers.

Bedelia left shortly after dinner, and Will helped Hannibal clean up afterwards. “I never said thank you,” he realized while drying a dinner plate that Hannibal had handed him.

“For?” Hannibal asked distractedly as he rinsed the now-empty sink clean.

“The flowers,” Will blushed. “Dinner. Everything.” He busied himself with setting the dry, clean, plate back in the cabinet, so he didn’t realize Hannibal was behind him until he was pressed into the cabinets with his body.

A soft kiss was pressed against his neck, and he tilted his head in search of another. Hannibal didn’t disappoint him, either. “I worried over the flowers,” Hannibal breathed against his skin while his hands held Will’s hips. “Were they… too much?”

“Too much?” Will teased, turning in Hannibal’s arms to lace his own around Hannibal’s neck. “The arrangement just barely fits through a doorway, Hannibal. Alana had to help me to my car because I couldn’t see while I was holding it.”

Hannibal almost looked contrite. “I hope I didn’t embarrass you.”

“No,” Will laughed, leaning forward to snatch a kiss from his pouting lips. “I was… shocked. They arrived when Jack was berating me for having anxiety, which did not help said anxiety.”

“Your boss?”

“Yep.”

“Berating you for not being emotionally stable for field work?” Hannibal continued. He almost looked… pissed. Will couldn’t be sure, though. He’d never seen Hannibal pissed off before this.

“Always,” Will sighed.

“Does he realize that causing you more anxiety about your anxiety will only impede your recovery time?” he wondered.

“I don’t think he much cares,” Will chuckled awkwardly. “He told me to spend less time worrying over my love life and focus on getting back in the field.”

Hannibal’s mouth was pursed in a tight, unforgiving, line. “And how do you feel about what he suggested?”

Will pressed a kiss to his jawline, holding his hips in his hands. “I feel like I’m about to tell him that I will not be returning to the field at all. I feel like… like my life is finally going in the right direction, and I don’t fucking care about Jack Crawford, or what he thinks.”

“I don’t want you to give up pieces of yourself for me,” Hannibal sighed.

“It’s not only because of you,” Will reassured softly while sliding his hands up the broad expanse of his chest. “He gets mad when I go visit my parents in the summer and winter when my classes are on break. He gets mad when I react to… well, anything I see at a scene. He gets frustrated when I need a minute to come back to myself. When I’ve had a nosebleed, or whatever. I feel like ninety percent of my anxiety comes from consulting, and… God, I’m sick of it.”

He stared at Will with a contemplative expression on his face, as though he wanted to say something, but wouldn’t. “What?” Will asked with a laugh.

“I don’t… I don’t feel that I have the right to… say anything about it.”

“You do,” Will assured him. “Just tell me.”

“If you hate it, then don’t do it,” Hannibal said bluntly. “I don’t want to direct you on your life. I haven’t been in it long enough to do that. I also think I don’t have any right to dictate to you about living your life to the fullest when I’ve lived in a coma for years, but Will,” he sighed. “I want you to be happy. More than anything else, that’s all I want.”

“I know,” he whispered. “I know that, Hannibal.”

“Good,” Hannibal breathed, leaning forward to scent at Will’s neck.

“For the record,” Will managed, tilting his head back when Hannibal pressed a kiss over his pulse point. “I don’t think you’re directing my life by offering me advice. I am talking to you about it because I care what you think, and I value your opinion. Okay?”

“Noted,” Hannibal smiled. “Would you care for a nightcap in the study?”

“I’d love that, but… I have to get going soon,” he said apologetically. “My dogs.”

“Perhaps another night then,” Hannibal nodded, even though he kind of looked crestfallen about it. “I’m very sorry that Bedelia interrupted our evening together.”

“Don’t be,” Will said immediately. He pressed a kiss against Hannibal’s cheek, and the older man’s eyes closed. “She’s… wonderful. I don’t blame her for what happened. I don’t resent her for anything. Yeah, I feel… jealousy over the fact that she’s spent all these years with you, but… I think that will dissipate with time. I like her, Hannibal. Really.”

Hannibal swallowed thickly while running his thumb against Will’s jawline. He looked so intensely moved that Will averted his eyes to Hannibal’s sternum. “You’re incredible, Will.”

He blushed, dipping his eyes down between their bodies to look at his scuffed up shoes. “I’m just me.”

“I’d like to… to take you out. On a date,” Hannibal clarified, a pretty blush staining his cheeks. “Just you and I.”

Will grinned while stepping into his space, cocking an eyebrow up at him. “Oh yeah? Where?”

The older man shuddered as Will began pressing kisses down the column of his neck, and he seemed to need a minute to remember what he was saying. “There’s a restaurant downtown. I can make reservations for tomorrow or Wednesday?”

A creeping sense of dread worked its way up Will’s spine. He pulled away to look up at Hannibal and gauge his reaction. “You’re not talking about Charleston, are you?”

As he suspected, Hannibal looked immediately uncertain. “Yes?”

Will shook his head. “No. I appreciate the offer, but no. I am not… I am not the kind of person who goes to five-star restaurants, and I know you know that. That place is crawling with lawyers that hate me from cases that I’ve worked. There are psychiatrists there that have treated me at one point or another. It’s… awkward for me.”

“I want to do something for you,” Hannibal sighed. “Something… nice. I want you to feel… appreciated.”

He smiled while kissing Hannibal’s cheek. “What do I like, Hannibal?”

“Dogs,” he replied immediately, and Will laughed.

“Okay, but what else?”

“Being outside. Fishing? Music, poetry, swimming,” he said consideringly. “I know what you like, Will. You and I… we’ve never gone out together. As in a restaurant where we could be relatively open about who we are to one another. We’ve always hid, and I don’t want to hide anymore.”

“I appreciate that,” Will assured him, placating the sting with a gentle kiss to Hannibal’s cheek. “I don’t want to hide anymore, either. I know this is your life now. I know this is how you… I don’t know, socialize, I guess. It’s not me, though.”

Hannibal’s mouth pinched, his eyes dipping down as if in embarrassment. “I’ll… I’ll think of something. It’s easy for me to fall back into familiar patterns. This is… this is all I know, Will.”

“I know,” Will sighed. “I’m in the same boat as you are. Was it rude to tell you I don’t want to go to Charleston?”

“Not at all,” Hannibal promised. “To be truthful, I don’t like the ass-kissing that happens when I go there. It’s… it’s just a reflex. I do it to impress, but… I don’t need to impress you, do I? Not in that way.”

“It would impress me more if you knew my dogs’ names, honestly.”

“Buster, Jack, Winston, Ellie, Max, Harley, and… Zoe. Zoe has the overbite,” Hannibal replied proudly.

Will’s heart slammed in his ribs while he stared up at Hannibal’s beaming face. “I’m impressed. Happy?”

“Endlessly,” Hannibal grinned. He leaned in for a kiss, and Will accepted it with a smile of his own.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, I AM SO SORRY THAT I DISAPPEARED. I started a new job, and by the time I come home I am so exhausted I don't even make dinner. To make matters worse, I HATE it. I left a job that I really liked for a job with slightly better pay, and it wasn't even remotely worth it. I have less free time, more anxiety, and to be honest, the shift sucks.

I've been battling a bit of depression about it, but I'm trying to be hopeful. It probably will get better. If it doesn't, there are other jobs out there.

I don't know how frequently I'll be able to post, but please know that I won't abandon this story. I'm going to reply to comments immediately following this, and I want you to know that I read EVERY SINGLE ONE and they make me smile when not much else has made me smile over the last month. Thank you guys. <333333333

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He headed home shortly afterwards, as he needed to tend to his dogs and grade some essays before his morning classes. He was falling behind on his laundry, so he got a load going while settling on his couch with a glass of whiskey.

Reading student essays should have been what he was doing, but his mind was preoccupied.

He'd met Bedelia. For the last eleven years he'd imagined her as a gloating victor, her wedding band gleaming from her undeserving finger. While in his imagination she was faceless, he'd somehow gotten it right that she was blonde and lovely. He had always been certain that should he ever meet her that he would hate her immediately.

He was wrong. Not only did he *not* hate her. He freaking *liked* her.

She was funny and sassy. Dry as a stick with her humor and shockingly perceptive. It was obvious she could handle Hannibal, which rankled him regardless of his appreciation of her. Will understood that was mostly jealousy on his part, though. He also understood it was baseless, because if anyone could handle Hannibal, it was him.

There was a spiteful part of him that wanted to see how far his newfound hold on Hannibal went. Maybe ask him to do some things that were completely out of his comfort zone, like go to a gay bar with him or put him in a pair of waders.

He knew he wanted those things because up until recently, he never had any damned idea how much Hannibal truly worshipped him. With his wedding announcement eleven years ago, Will had been certain he'd never meant anything to Hannibal.

He set his essays aside with a huff, then ruffled his fingers through Winston's fur. His dog was by his hip, sleeping and loyal to a fault.

If he would have asked, Hannibal would have come home with him. He knew it. He knew it, and he wanted it when Hannibal had kissed him goodnight in his foyer. It didn't change the fact that he didn't ask.

The relationship he had with Hannibal always walked a fine line between love and obsession. Craving Hannibal's company was his biggest vice, even eleven years ago. As an adult, he understood that they needed to move slowly and get to know one another again. That was the healthy thing to do, really.

There was another part of him that didn't care how unhealthy it was. He wanted Hannibal with him in his house, in his bed. In his life and in his hands. He wanted to breathe the same air as him and smell him on his bedsheets. Will wanted the taste of him on his tongue and the warmth of his arms around him.

It felt like he'd been given keys to the candy shop and been told to have at it.

He wasn't sure what the equivalent to diabetes was in this situation, but he knew he would glut himself until it happened.

The following day was busy. He had classes to teach and papers to grade during his break and his lunch. After work he had an appointment with Dr. Petersen, and unsurprisingly, he left still uncleared for field work.

The entire day felt… long. By the time he turned onto his street, his shoulders were slumped, and his disposition was sour. It didn't help his mood that there was someone parked in his driveway. A black car and a white utility van.

"The fuck?" he mumbled while pulling in alongside the van.

The van was some kind of catering service. The car…

The car was Hannibal's sleek, black, Bentley.

His house looked dark and quiet, but there were lights out by his stream. Lights, and what appeared to be a table, though he was too far away from it to see it clearly.

He exited his Volvo and walked across his side yard towards the stream, breathing in the cool late afternoon air. Hannibal smiled wide when he noticed Will. "I expected you sometime after six," Hannibal said as he walked over.

There was in fact a table as well as two chairs. There were candles lit on its surface as well as a gorgeous floral arrangement at the table's center. One of the men from the catering company was setting up lights around the perimeter of the dining area while the other was arranging plates.

"You *expected* me?" he asked in confusion. "Did we make plans that I forgot about?"

"No," Hannibal chuckled, dipping his chin while a blush stained his high cheekbones. "I… well, I suppose I wanted to surprise you. Combine a few things that you love."

Will ducked his head while stepping into Hannibal's space, though his eyes were taking in the scenery. "Dinner at my stream," he realized. "Hannibal, you didn't need to go through all this trouble."

"No trouble," he said immediately. "You do not care for Charleston's atmosphere, but their food is quite amazing. I had them come out here to serve us. Hardly any trouble for me at all."

Shock made him speechless. No one had ever done anything like this for him in his life. The little table was covered with a white tablecloth, and the chairs where honest-to-God, dining chairs with cushions. It looked like they were dining in a fancy restaurant except there were no walls.

Just wide-open space with the sun setting behind the trees. The sounds of water bubbling over rocks and downstream.

“Why don’t you go get your dogs?” Hannibal asked after a beat. “Dinner’s almost ready.”

“You… brought dinner for my dogs?” he asked in surprise.

“Of course,” he laughed. Before Will could respond in kind, a swift kiss was pressed to his cheek before Hannibal stepped away to oversee the men that were setting up. He flushed when he realized that one of the men saw them, though there wasn’t any look of disgust or shock to be found on his face.

Will felt completely out of his element, so he turned and went to his house to get his dogs.

They were excited to see him for the split half a second it took for them to realize that there was something happening in their yard before they took off towards Hannibal and their stream. He watched from his porch in abject horror as Max pounced on Hannibal, dirty paws grinding into a suit that likely costed more than Will’s entire wardrobe.

He heard Hannibal’s vibrant laugh even from this far away, a small, secret smile lifting the corners of his mouth as Hannibal bent over to press a kiss against the eager dog’s snout. His chest felt tight while watching him greet every dog, petting them as though he’d known them for years.

That’s the love of my life, he thought with a chuckle. *That’s who I’m going to spend the rest of my life with.*

Hannibal greeted him with another kiss upon his return, and Will blushed when Hannibal pulled his chair out for him at the dinner table. “I considered black bass for our entrée,” Hannibal began while tucking Will into his seat. “The atmosphere certainly would have complimented the dish. However, I decided that red meat was likely to be more appreciated. I imagine you have fish for dinner quite a bit.”

Will swallowed thickly as Hannibal took his seat opposite Will, the candlelight illuminating his eyes as though they were lit from within. His dogs each had a metal bowl filled with something the caterers had brought, though he couldn’t imagine that Hannibal had paid for steak dinners for them.

He felt strangely nervous, though he had no reason to be. “If by red meat you mean steak, then it’s absolutely appreciated.”

Hannibal beamed and reached for Will’s hand across the table. “I suspected as much.”

Will blanched as one of the caterers brought their salads to the table and Hannibal did not release their hands. Hannibal of course caught on to why he was nervous and smiled while turning to the blonde man at their side. “Will, I’d like to introduce you to Rob. He is the sous-chef at Charleston.”

“Nice to meet you,” Will said immediately, and Rob nodded.

“The pleasure is all mine, sir.”

“This is Marc,” Hannibal continued when the other caterer wandered over with fresh bread in a basket. “Marc, my partner Will.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” he said cordially.

“Marc and Rob have been together for… forgive me, six years?” he asked Rob uncertainly.

“Seven,” Marc chuckled. “Feels more like twenty.”

Rob laughed while setting out their salad dressing. “Keep it up, darling.”

“I explained our… situation to Marc, and he insisted on doing this for us tonight,” Hannibal continued with a wide smile. “I am grateful to you both.”

“Always a pleasure to work with you, Doctor Lecter,” Marc replied politely. “If there’s anything you need, please let me know.”

Will felt… distinctly out of his element being catered to like this. Especially in his own yard. He reached for his glass of champagne absently before setting it back down. Maybe Hannibal wanted to toast? Should he wait to drink it? There was a bottle of red wine opened on the table as well. Would it be rude to pour himself some of that, instead?

“Will,” Hannibal chuckled while reaching for his own wine glass. “Drink. Please. This is as relaxing of an atmosphere as we can have. There’s no pretense and no need for anxiety.”

“Could you tell?”

“You look ready to run for the tree line,” he laughed.

“Might’ve thought about it,” Will admitted with an awkward laugh of his own.

Hannibal raised his champagne glass with a smile, prompting Will to snatch his up as well. Their glasses clinked and it sounded like the tinkling of bells. “To us,” Hannibal said softly, eyes sparkling in the candlelight.

“To us,” Will repeated gratefully before taking a generous sip from the glass.

Despite himself, he was eventually able to relax. Hannibal’s company was warm and wonderful as it usually was, and the food was excellent. Wine and champagne flowed easily as their dinner progressed, and Will felt more comfortable and at ease than he had in a long time.

The warmth of the wine made his tongue loosen, his inhibitions vanishing into the cool September night. “She did,” he laughed, spurred on by Hannibal’s own startled laughter. “She

said she was disappointed that two lovely men were taken off her plate. Her *plate*, Han. Like we're a couple of steaks."

Hannibal swiped tears of laughter from his cheeks while pulling in a deep breath. "I've no words, really. I've never given her any inclination that I was interested."

Will sipped his wine with a shrug. "I mean, we went to dinner a few times, but I don't think it could be considered dating," he admitted. "She's a lovely woman, and she's ridiculously kind. We both were making it more than it was, I think. Loneliness is a bitch."

"It's outrageous to me that she's been waiting for my divorce this whole time," Hannibal chuckled. "Regardless, I'll be in her debt for the rest of my life for bringing you back to me."

Will blushed while sipping his wine. Hannibal's eyes looked like lit amber in the candlelight, his handsome face both grateful and adoring. He glanced off towards his dogs that were sleeping off their big meals in the grass, then off to where their servers were cleaning up and packing things away into the van.

This had been, by far, the best date night he'd ever had. All because of this beautiful man who loved him enough to make the effort. If Alana had told him whose home she was bringing him to that night, he'd never have gone. All of this would have been lost to him. "I'm grateful to her, too," he said thickly.

Hannibal beamed and laced their fingers together on the table.

It got too cool and dark to stay outside for much longer, so they retreated to the house while Marc and Rob packed away their table and chairs. The moment the door closed behind them, Will pressed Hannibal back against the door while threading his fingers through his hair. "Thank you for tonight," he said softly. "No one's… I've never had anyone do anything like that for me. It was perfect."

Hannibal's fingers traced his jawline, his eyes following their movement as though he were memorizing the feel of it. "You'll have a lifetime more of it. Anything, Will."

The sincerity in his tone, reflecting in his eyes, stunned Will to silence. Their mouths met because Will needed to kiss him in that moment. Needed it more than air, more than the blood in his veins. The taste of him was still sweet from their champagne, his nose cold from the air outside as it brushed against Will's cheek.

The soft groan from Hannibal made Will flush hot as he pressed against him more firmly. Soft kisses were trailed down his throat, and he tipped his head back with a moan to encourage Hannibal to continue. "Can you stay tonight?" Will asked breathlessly.

"I can," Hannibal murmured distractedly while licking over Will's Adam's apple. "I hoped you might ask, so I brought a bag with me for tomorrow."

"Bit presumptuous of you, no?" Will teased with a laugh. "This was only our first date."

“Our first date happened eleven years ago on a berm by the Alpi Orobie. You shared your favorite spot with me and kissed me senseless in the grass. It was blissful,” he sighed while kissing his way back to Will’s mouth.

“That was not our first date,” he laughed. “It *can’t* be a first date if I didn’t even think you liked me at the time. I think-” Will bit out a moan when Hannibal ground against him while gripping his ass in his hands. “I think our first date was maybe when you took me to the garden by the side of the house? We’d had too much Rosatello and we talked openly for maybe the first time. I think that was the night we made love till dawn, too.”

“It wasn’t that night,” Hannibal sighed against his skin. “That night was our *second* night together. My second time being inside of you. You went to breakfast the next morning smelling of clean skin and my come. God, you drove me crazy. You still do.”

Will tipped away from him, arching an eyebrow. “You still remember?”

Hannibal kissed his cheek sweetly. “I told you already. I remember everything.”

They made their way to Will’s room where they took their time undressing one another. Will took note of every detail, stowing it away like it was crucial information. Hannibal used the fifth loop on his belt, which made him think of Mafalda. She’d be upset that Hannibal was this thin and insist on feeding him until he was at least on the third beltloop. His cufflinks were little gold squares that matched his tie pin perfectly.

He straddled Hannibal on the bed, but neither were motivated to do more than share gentle kisses now and again. Will was busy relearning every little detail on Hannibal’s body. He still had a freckle on his ribs that Will still felt compelled to kiss every time he saw it. Hannibal was distracted himself, pressing soft kisses to Will’s skin while trailing his eyes over every inch of him.

“Where did you get this?” Hannibal asked softly while touching a scar on Will’s shoulder. “I meant to ask the last time, but... I was very distracted.”

“I uh,” Will almost considered lying because he knew Hannibal would not take this news well. “I was stabbed by a suspect on my first raid with the FBI.”

“You were *what*?” Hannibal sputtered, sitting up enough to click on the lamp. “*Stabbed*? With a knife? Was it very serious?”

His fingers were probing around the area with concern, his eyes tight and focused on the long-ago healed wound. “It... well, yeah. I guess? I lost a lot of blood. He nicked the axillary artery and I guess I kind of coded on the table. I don’t remember any of it, but I know I took four units of blood. I was out of commission for four months. I’m fine now, though.”

“You cannot *kind of code*,” Hannibal said thickly. “Your heart stopped beating. You could have died, and I wouldn’t have known. Christ, Will. I should have been there.”

“Hannibal, please,” Will said soothingly while smoothing the tightness around Hannibal’s eyes with his thumbs. “I’m fine. It would have happened whether you were in my life or not, right? There’s nothing to feel guilty about. Look at me,” Will implored because Hannibal was still staring at the little line of scarring on his shoulder. Watery eyes flickered up to his own, and Will pressed a kiss to his cheek. “You will be in my life from now on. For everything. Okay? Stop doing this to yourself.”

He was immediately scooped into strong arms, held tightly and desperately against Hannibal’s strong chest. Hannibal pressed his nose into Will’s throat and inhaled deeply while Will carded his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, doing his best to soothe him. “Why didn’t you tell me of this before? We’ve spoken of so much.”

“Because I know you well enough to know you’d do this,” Will sighed affectionately while Hannibal nuzzled him and scented him as though something might be wrong with Will even after all this time. “I told myself I’d only tell you if you outright asked, and... well, you asked.”

With a thick swallow, Hannibal relaxed back against the pillows. Will followed, shifting his weight up Hannibal’s bare thighs so he could press kisses over the tempting line of his collarbone. “Make love to me?”

It was requested so softly and hesitantly that Will didn’t quite hear it. “Sorry?” he asked while rubbing his stubbled jaw against Hannibal’s chest.

“Make love to me? Please?”

Hannibal looked almost shy about asking, perhaps even nervous, though Will couldn’t understand why. “You can’t possibly think I’d say no to you, can you?”

“No?” he laughed, though it sounded uncertain. “Just nervous, I think. There’s been no one but you, Will.”

There was a very small part of him that knew as much, but it was still a surprise to hear it. Will’s self-esteem had always been almost nonexistent, so it was difficult to believe that Hannibal had been saving a part of himself for Will all this time. “Because you love me,” Will said quietly, dipping his eyes away from Hannibal’s in disbelief.

Long fingers cupped his chin, dragging his eyes up to meet Hannibal’s own. “Because I love you,” Hannibal agreed with conviction. “Because I have loved no one else since you. Because you are my other half. Because I wanted something to stay ours all this time. I couldn’t imagine letting anyone else inside of me after you. I waited for the same reason that you did. We are the same.”

Will choked on the tears that were clogging his throat. He slammed his eyes shut to hide them, but they spilled over his cheeks regardless. Hannibal cupped his face in his palms, wiping them away with his thumbs. “I love you,” Will whispered. “I’ve never stopped loving you.”

“Hannibal,” his lover sighed, drawing Will’s eyes open in shock. “Hannibal, Hannibal,” he whispered while dragging Will in for a kiss.

Hannibal’s own eyes were glassy, so Will wiped the dampness from his cheeks while sipping at his sweet mouth. “Will,” he replied. “Will.”

Their kisses became urgent, then demanding. Hannibal dipped his tongue into Will’s mouth, holding his face in his big hands as though he were holding something precious. He reached for the lube once they parted, feeling a distinct sense of unreality while watching Hannibal arch into his touch.

How often he’d dreamed of this exact thing, he thought. In his dreams, his hands were younger. His fingers were thinner. The bed was covered in yellow sheets, with the scent of lavender wafting in from the windows.

The man under him had changed a bit as well, but he was still the most beautiful man that Will had ever seen.

Will slid his hands up Hannibal’s silken thighs, marveling over how long and slender his legs were. Every inch of him was perfect, right down to his plush top lip that begged for an affectionate bite.

Hannibal hitched his legs up Will’s sides, anchoring them over Will’s forearms for comfort. Will had to close his eyes at the sight, simply too fucking beautiful for his own good. He slickened his fingers, spreading Hannibal open to press one inside.

The heat and constriction was divine, as was the little sigh of relief from the love of his life. “You feel perfect,” Hannibal whispered. “I’ve dreamed of this- of you, for forever.”

“Every time I dreamt of this,” Will responded, watching the way Hannibal’s body parted welcomingly for a second finger. “Every time, it was in yellow bedsheets. There was... the scent of lavender blowing through the opened window. There was sunlight slanting in, making you even more golden and beautiful than you usually are.”

“No dogs sniffing at the bedroom door, then,” Hannibal laughed.

“No,” he agreed with a huff of laughter. “It doesn’t make this any less like heaven.”

“I can’t remember anymore,” Hannibal remarked with a soft sigh of pleasure.

“Remember what?” he asked, pressing a kiss against Hannibal’s knee.

“If you always looked at me like this,” he whispered. “As though you worship me.”

“I certainly did,” Will promised, cheeks heating with a vivid blush. “I told you back then that I worshipped you. I still do.”

“I think I was too busy worshipping you to notice,” he chuckled, gasping as Will pressed another finger inside of him. His entrance pulsed around Will’s fingers, as though he were trying to take them inside of him more. “I’m ready, Will.”

“There’s more of me than there used to be,” Will pointed out, making Hannibal’s blush deepen.

“There certainly is,” he agreed. “I am still ready. Please. Will, please.”

He might be ready, but Christ, Will didn’t feel like he was. This felt *enormous*. Too big to contain. He’d made his peace a decade ago that he and Hannibal were over. That their love burned bright and fast, like a match being struck before going out. The last time he’d been buried inside of someone, they’d meant literally nothing to him. This. This was very, very, different from that.

Hannibal’s warm palm slid up and down his ribcage, distracting him from his thoughts. “Stay with me,” he asked softly. “I’m right here, beloved.”

He was. Hannibal was right here, in bed with him. This wasn’t some random man he was trying to dull the pain with, this was the man who owned his heart. He slicked himself quickly, strung too tight to do more than that, then lined himself up.

With their eyes on one another, he pressed in. With every forward inch, his emotions spilled out.

Hannibal went blurry, and he blinked back surprising tears that the love of his life swept aside with his thumbs. He leaned over him, devouring his mouth as his hips settled in the cradle of Hannibal’s own.

They held one another close while he thrusted gently, trying desperately to make this last. He was gloriously tight and wet, pulsing around Will like a heartbeat, his cock trapped in the humid space between their stomachs. He smelled incredible, and tasted even better.

Hannibal moaned into his mouth as Will shifted his legs up higher, ensuring that he’d nail that spot inside with every drive of his hips. With a little grunt of effort, Hannibal pushed him away before climbing into his lap, taking him back inside with a sensuous roll of his hips.

Will’s toes curled in the sheets, overcome. With his hands freed, he roamed them over Hannibal’s broad chest, rolling his nipples until they stiffened. Hannibal’s hips stuttered, his head rolling back as he slowly ground down on Will’s cock, his moans echoing in the room like a prayer.

He slid his hands down, one holding his slender waist while the other gripped Hannibal’s own leaking cock. “Will,” he said softly, drawing Hannibal’s attention with a start. “Will, Will.”

He gave Will a lazy smile while grinding and pulsing around him like a fist. “Hannibal,” he said breathlessly. “Hannibal.”

Hannibal rocked forward, claiming Will’s mouth in a devastating kiss while his pace increased vigorously. Will sat up, gripping his ass in his hands while sucking his lips, biting them in his frustration.

He came first, which didn't surprise him with how worked up he felt. What surprised him was the intensity of it, how even his blood seemed to sing as he crashed over the edge. Once he'd emptied himself deep inside, he pressed Hannibal back against the bed and sucked his cock down his throat.

"Fuck," Hannibal cried, fisting Will's hair. He needed the taste of him on his tongue. He needed something of Hannibal inside of him, too.

It took barely moments before he flooded Will's mouth, and Will licked him clean like a beast, claiming every drop that Hannibal had to give him.

Afterwards, he laid on top of Hannibal bonelessly while they traced one another's damp skin with their fingertips. "I know you are sick of hearing it probably," Will whispered, "But I love you."

"Sick of it?" Hannibal asked in surprise. "I will never, *ever*, be sick of it. Never. I love you so *dearly*. I never thought I'd hear you say it to me again, so please. Please, say it. When you want to, I want to hear it."

"Love you," Will grinned, pressing kisses up his furred chest. "I love you, love you, *love* you," he repeated, making Hannibal laugh as Will claimed his mouth again. Hannibal held his face like he was a living miracle, tilting his head so he could kiss Will as deeply as Will had been buried inside of him.

Chapter End Notes

GOD THIS HAS TAKEN TOO LONG AND I AM SORRY. Sorry!

I have been ridiculously sick, unemployed, and depressed. SO. All that aside, I lost touch with this story, so I needed to kind of reread it to get the feel for it back. That being said, this story is NOW COMPLETE OH SHIT, and has... I think two chapters left? Three? I gotta figure out how to break them up, but something like that.

It won't be 2342 years before the next update, I promise. Thank you for being patient, and for sticking with me. <333333

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning was rushed. Both of them had to be at work, and they'd both forgotten to set an alarm. Still, Hannibal pressed a kiss to his lips, promising that he'd call when he got a chance. With that, they headed off to work.

His day was bullshit. All he wanted was to spend a lazy day with Hannibal in bed, exploring one another, relearning the fine details that he'd forgotten.

Instead, he had meetings and lectures, papers to grade, and stale coffee.

The stale coffee was the worst part, really, at least until Jack barreled into his lecture hall, demanding to know when he'd be cleared for field work. As if anything fucking changed in a day.

It didn't piss him off the way it normally did, though. He felt strangely absent from it, like it wasn't his problem, for some reason. Maybe it was burnout, maybe it was because he didn't fucking care anymore. He had no idea, but his flippant responses only pissed Jack off to no end, resulting in his lecture hall door being slammed so loud they likely heard it in space.

Will raised an eyebrow while watching him go, sipping his coffee that somehow tasted like an ashtray.

Yeah, the coffee was the worst part of his day.

His night was peaceful, for the most part. Rain was battering the windows and roof, which made being inside all the more pleasant. He had a glass of good whiskey while nestled in blankets on his couch, his dogs sleeping by his feet and on the rug next to him.

The only irritation was the student essays he was grading. Well, trying to grade, anyway.

His thoughts kept drifting to Hannibal, as they usually did. Was it too early to live together? He'd shut Bedelia down that afternoon at Hannibal's house, saying it was way too soon to be thinking of anything like sharing a home.

It wasn't, though.

He could imagine Hannibal here with him right now. Maybe snuggled close under the blanket with him while they snickered over horrible essays together.

'The serial killer killed fourteen people, ruining their lives as well as their bodies.'

Will kept rereading the same line over and over, chuckling to himself while sipping his drink. He honestly didn't know where to begin. Of course, their lives were ruined. They were *dead*, for God's sake.

Now to figure out a polite way to say that it was the stupidest line he'd ever read and offer constructive criticism at the same time.

His phone rang, and he set the essay aside with a sigh. "Hello?"

"Beloved," Hannibal answered, and Will could practically hear the smile in his voice.

"I was just thinking about you," Will admitted with a blush.

"Were you," Hannibal drawled. "How serendipitous, because my thoughts are constantly about you, too."

"I just..." he sighed and decided to be honest. "I just miss you."

"And I miss you, beloved. How was your day?"

"It was..." Will grimaced. "It was a day. What about you?"

"Long," he chuckled, the sound warm and rumbling. "My body was at work, but my heart and mind were with you."

"I know exactly what you mean," Will agreed with a blush. "Maybe this weekend we can have a lazy day, with no one fucking bothering us about anything."

"Mm," Hannibal sighed. "Just you and I, a bed, and seven dogs. I find myself craving it."

"Even the dogs?" Will asked with a laugh.

"I've taken a shine to Max," he admitted sheepishly. "Buster is a little hellion who makes me laugh with his tenacity. I'm learning to love them, Will."

"I'm glad to hear it," Will grinned.

"I did call for a specific reason, though. Apart from wanting to hear your voice."

"What's that?" Will asked while setting his essays aside for later. Hannibal took precedence over everything else.

"Jack Crawford called me this afternoon," he admitted slowly. "That is your boss, is it not?"

"Kind of," Will scowled. "He's kind of my boss when I do them the favor of profiling for them. My boss is technically in the academic department. Why did he call you?"

"He requested my help on a profile, though I don't know why. I have no experience with it, though he insisted that made no difference. Apparently, Alana has been recommending me for some time now and he finally made the decision to reach out."

Will bit his lip while swirling his whiskey in his glass. “A profile on who? What case?”

“He did not say. There are some nondisclosures that must be signed before any more detail can be ascertained.”

“Did you agree to it?” Will asked hesitantly.

“That is why I am calling,” Hannibal confessed. “I understand that you may not want to run into me at your work. If you’d prefer I don’t, there would be no hard feelings, Will. I promise you.”

“No,” Will blurted immediately. “No, Hannibal. It wouldn’t upset me to see you at my work. Besides, I’m not profiling right now and it doesn’t seem like that’s happening any time soon. If you want to do some profiling for the FBI, then you go right ahead and do it. I’d suggest that you ask some questions before signing any agreements. Jack can be... kind of demanding. Okay, *really* demanding. Ask him how long the assignment would take to finish, okay? Better yet, you lay down your own time limit for availability. Something like that.”

“I’ll be sure to get details before signing anything,” Hannibal said consideringly.

“Are you sure you want to get involved in something like this?” Will wondered. “I mean, I imagine he’s reaching out to you for a case, or to evaluate a suspect. It can be... difficult. Violent.”

“I’ve no doubt,” Hannibal agreed hesitantly. “You know how... unhappy I’ve been in my practice. I just...” he sighed, “I just want something different. Something I haven’t done before. I plan to ask questions of Mr. Crawford and see just what he needs, precisely. Trust me when I say that I won’t take anything on that feels like a burden.”

“Good,” Will murmured. “I know you’ve been thinking about doing something different, but... I don’t know if this is what you’re looking for. If you think it is, then I support you.”

“If you’re certain, then I will meet with him tomorrow,” Hannibal said slowly. “Are you certain?”

“Very,” he promised. “I’d love having you in the same building as me when lunch time rolls around. It would be nice to see each other during the day, right?”

“Very,” Hannibal chuckled. “I love you, you know.”

“Mm,” Will grinned. “And I love you.”

“I’ll be meeting with Jack sometimes around eleven, I think. What time do you usually go to lunch?”

“Twelve-thirty,” Will said, smiling widely. “You going to come pick me up at my lecture hall, Doctor Lecter?”

"If I can manage to find it,” he laughed. “I’ll see you tomorrow, beloved, and I cannot wait.”

The next day was very busy for him. He had two early lectures and a meeting with the director of the academy about several of the students that might not be cut out to be FBI agents. Just as he was leaving the meeting, Jack Crawford's secretary met him in the hall to see if Will had a few minutes to meet with Jack.

What he wanted more than anything was a cup of coffee, but it would have to wait.

It was almost eleven-thirty, and Will wondered if Hannibal's appointment with Jack had already finished. If it had, then there was no way it had gone well.

He followed the receptionist into the office where he could hear Jack's booming voice even through the door. "-won't clear him," Jack was saying. "I need a second opinion on his mental health because we need him in the field."

The inner-office door swung open, and Jack beamed. "Ah, here he is!" he bellowed. "Dr. Lecter, this is Will Graham. Will, this is Dr. Hannibal Lecter."

Will blinked in shock just as Hannibal turned to look at him. He looked startled and uncomfortable, which was exactly how Will was feeling. "What's this about?" Will asked bluntly.

"Forgive him, Dr. Lecter," Jack begged disapprovingly. "He can be acerbic, but he's very good at his job." He turned to Will with an air of condescension when he continued. "Dr. Lecter is a renowned psychologist, Will. He wrote several articles on social exclusion as well as contributed to research regarding empathy disorders. I've asked him to come and meet with you."

Hannibal's face had gone white as a sheet. He turned back to Jack with a frown. "You've asked me here to consult on one of your own?"

"It's irregular, I know," Jack conceded. "Will is currently under the care of a friend of your wife's, I understand. Dr. Petersen? He's seen him for a few weeks now with no real improvement. I think you're a better fit to... fix whatever is wrong."

"*Fix* me?" Will spat. "There's nothing wrong with me!"

"Will, please," Jack sighed.

"I'm afraid I cannot condone this for several reasons," Hannibal interjected. "He is receiving care, Mr. Crawford. It would not be appropriate for me to intercede."

"Inappropriate, maybe," Jack shrugged. "It's not unethical, though."

"He can't treat me," Will blurted, drawing both men's attention back to him even though all he wanted in that moment was to leave and never look back.

"He *can*, and he *will*," Jack decided.

“We... know one another,” Will said desperately. “Personally.”

Hannibal seemed surprised that Will admitted that much, while Jack looked immensely skeptical that Will would know such a well-accomplished man personally. “Maybe you’ve met before this, but that doesn’t make it personal, Will.”

“Will is right,” Hannibal sighed awkwardly. “He and I... are well acquainted. It’s one of the several reasons that make my treating him an impossibility.”

“Well acquainted, but not friends!” Jack boomed. “So, you’ve met one another in passing. I’m asking you both to set that aside in order to get my best profiler back. Saving lives, which is why we’re all here.”

“He’s my *partner*,” Will blurted, drawing two shocked expressions back to him. “Hannibal is my partner. My lover. My best friend. Who are you to decide how well I know someone else? You don’t know me, Jack. You know nothing about me!”

Jack looked fit to pass out before schooling his features into one of regretful annoyance. “He’s unwell, Dr. Lecter. I’ve told you as much.”

“He’s not lying to you,” Hannibal said softly. “Will is my partner.”

Will’s gift caught onto several different emotions radiating off Jack at the same time. Disgust, annoyance, and the most upsetting; humor. “The two of you are having me on, aren’t you? I must say I’m not amused. I’ve met your wife, Dr. Lecter.”

“We are divorced,” Hannibal informed Jack, whose humor dissipated in the wind. “We’ve been separated for the last two years. Will and I have been seeing one another. I cannot treat him, Mr. Crawford.”

He couldn’t say what facial expressions passed over Jack’s face, as he’d taken to staring at the floor for the last ten minutes. It was utterly silent for so long that Will shifted his feet, wishing the floor would swallow him whole.

“You’re both...” Jack seemed unable to even yell at that point, and his voice simmered with disgust and rage. “You’re *homosexual*? And you’re teaching the future recruits of the FBI?”

Will snapped his head up, glaring at Jack fiercely. “I teach them exactly what they need to know. My personal life has no effect on my abilities as a professor.”

“It’s no wonder you’re so emotional in the field,” Jack continued as though Will hadn’t spoken. “It’s like having a *woman* on the team!”

“Mr. Crawford,” Hannibal murmured. Will could practically feel the vibration of his annoyance against his skin. “Our sexual orientation no more affects our careers any more than a person’s skin color affects their ability to do their job. It was not all that long ago that a man such as yourself would not have been considered for this position, yet here you are.”

“Are you implying that I am unfit for my position because of my skin color, Dr. Lecter?” Jack asked with simmering rage in his tone.

“Quite the opposite,” Hannibal explained. “I’m saying that preferences and skin color have nothing to do with a person’s ability to perform their jobs effectively. What makes you unfit for your position is your lack of empathy. Your disregard for the human beings that work for you. I’ve not known you long, but I know you well enough to say that you spoke of Will as though he were a printer that had stopped working. As though his mental health were nothing more than an inconvenience to you. You don’t view your team as people with emotions and thoughts- you view them as machines that are meant to give you what you want regardless of their exhaustion or the cost it has on them personally.”

“I worked hard to get in this position,” Jack argued slowly, enunciating each word so that it would be carefully considered. “No one coddled me. No one pussy-footed around and hugged me when scenes were difficult. I go to the same scenes as my team, and I don’t have a therapist to mollycoddle me while I cry because life is hard.”

“Perhaps you should have a therapist,” Hannibal suggested while Jack sputtered. “You go to the scenes, but you do not do what Will does, do you? His gift gives him the ability to experience the crime as though it were happening to him, or as though he were the one committing the atrocity. Have you considered what that does to him, personally?”

“What I’ve considered is this,” Jack spat. “I hired him to do a specific job. He is unfit to perform that job and all of its functions. What does a person in a management position do when one of his employees is not performing to capacity?”

“Fire me,” Will offered with a laugh, startling both men. “Please. I fucking hate it, Jack. Let me go, and I’ll hitch my talents to a teaching post only.”

Jack sputtered. “You want to quit? You save lives, Will. If you could get your head out of the clouds and focus-”

“Not interested,” Will interjected. “As a matter of fact, I quit.”

He turned on his heel and exited the office quickly, ignoring the booming, “Is he *fucking kidding*!” that Jack bellowed as the door closed behind him.

The whole situation was mortifying. Will was apparently so unstable that Jack had called in the love of his life to fix him. The disparity between them had grown without Will realizing it. Hannibal was successful in his career. He’d made a name for himself and garnered the respect and admiration of his peers.

Will, however, was a fucking mess.

Why would Hannibal want to be with him? He doubted that his partner had ever been called in to evaluate anyone else he’d ever been with. Bedelia was the very epitome of dignified success. He didn’t know Tim, but he imagined that if he worked for the DA’s office, he must have his life put together.

“Will!” With tears in his eyes, he turned to watch Hannibal jogging to catch up to him. “I had no idea,” he said breathlessly when he caught up. “You must know, I would never have come had I known why he wanted my assistance.”

“He wanted your assistance because I am fucking unstable,” Will spat viciously. “Why are you even... why are you interested, Hannibal?”

Hannibal’s eyes widened, glancing around the vacant corridor to ensure they were alone. “I love you, Will.”

“You loved who I *used* to be,” Will replied dismissively. “You loved me as a teenager, who was filled with endless potential. You said that to me, or did you forget that?”

“I remember what I said,” he whispered. “I remember everything.”

“You love a ghost,” Will told him seriously. “You loved a boy that was filled with hopes and dreams that went exactly nowhere. I fail at everything I do. That boy you loved is *dead*, Hannibal. He's gone. I am nothing like him, anymore. You don’t love me for who I am, because... because *no one* could.”

Hannibal looked as though he’d been slapped. “You’re upset, and you have every right to be. You’re wrong, though. I love you for exactly who you are, thorns and all. You have this... idea in your head that I have my life together. That I am somehow above you, in some way. Will, look at my fucking *life*. Look at me. The only thing I’ve succeeded in doing is hiding my depression better than you do.”

The tears that had welled up spilled over, but Hannibal swept them aside with his thumbs. “You deserve better than the human wreckage that I am,” Will whispered. “I’m heading home, and... I think I want to be alone, alright?”

Without a backward glance, he headed off to his car.

He knew, technically, that he was missing an afternoon class. It didn’t concern him too much, because he was certain that Jack would be reaching out to his boss to tell him about what he’d learned this afternoon. There were no homosexuals in the FBI, nor in the academy. At least, not any that were allowed to be open about their sexuality.

It was only a matter of time before he’d be fired for something or another, anyway.

Despite the early hour, he let the dogs outside and poured himself a full glass of whiskey while sitting on the porch. His eyes trailed over to where Hannibal had arranged their impromptu date night, the grass still flat and squashed where they’d set up the table and lights.

He had no fucking idea what he wanted to do with his life. If he were honest, even teaching criminal psych didn’t make him happy. Not really.

The tears came again, but this time he didn’t fight them. He cried hard, letting his frustration out fully. By the time he finished, Winston had pressed himself against his side, soothing him in the only way he could. Will hugged him, burying his nose in his soft fur while his sobs subsided.

Distantly, he heard his phone ringing from inside the house. It could only be Hannibal, but he honestly didn't feel like talking about this anymore. Guilt crept in, though, and he felt it would be fair if he said as much.

He headed back into the house, pressing play on his answering machine. It was not Hannibal's voice that greeted him, though.

"Will," his mother said despondently. "I know you're working, Tesoro. Your father... your father had an episode today. He... he coughed until there was blood. Will, there was *so much* blood. I took him to the clinic, but they flew him to Cremona. We are here, so there's no number to reach me. They've done some testing, and... Will," her voice broke while Will's heart shattered. "It's very bad. There's nothing... there's nothing they can do. There are... tumors. In both lungs, in his... vessels surrounding them. He waited too long," she sobbed. "He waited too long. They have him... resting. Keeping him comfortable. You need to come, Will. If you want to see him... if you want to see him before..."

Before he died, Will realized. His entire body felt numb while he listened to his mother cry. "Please. When you get this... come. Come home, Tesoro. I love you."

He dashed through his house, throwing whatever clothing he could grab into his suitcase while waiting on the phone with the airline. Once his flight was booked for three hours from then, he called Hannibal.

"Hello?"

"*Hannibal*," Will said, releasing the torrent of emotion that he'd kept in check until that moment.

"What's wrong?" he said immediately. "Will, what happened?"

"My Dad," he said thickly. "My Dad was taken to the hospital. He's... he's *dying*, Hannibal. My Maman said he's riddled with tumors in his lungs."

"Oh, Will," he said softly. "I'm so sorry, beloved. Let me contact an airline, and we can go-"

"I already did," he interjected. "What I need... what I need from you is for you to take care of my dogs, please. Please watch them for me. I know it's a lot to ask, but-"

"I will do that," Hannibal promised. "I want to go with you. I should be there for you."

It was all Will wanted, but he'd never ask. "I need *this* from you more. I need to know they're okay while I'm gone. I'm leaving my house key under the first stair of the porch. On the left side, okay?"

"Alright," Hannibal said softly. "Will, I can pay someone to come to the house for the dogs. I want to be with you, beloved."

“You have your career here,” Will responded. “I have no idea how long I’ll be gone. I have to go, alright? My flight leaves in less than three hours.”

“I love you,” Hannibal said reverently. “So very much.”

Will bit back a sob, clutching the phone until the plastic creaked. “I love you, Hannibal. Thank you.”

He hung up, then ran to catch his flight.

It took sixteen hours for him to get to the hospital, and he did not sleep through a moment of it. Without even stopping for a hotel, he went directly there with his bag rolling behind him. He went to the reception desk, and got the number for his father’s room.

He was in the ICU, which wasn’t a good sign.

The ICU receptionist held his bags for him while he headed off towards room four.

His mother was there, holding the hand of a man who looked nothing at all like his father. Tears welled in his eyes as he took in the sickly man on the bed, his pallor grey and lifeless. His lips were blue, a telltale sign that his lungs were not working as they were meant to.

He crept into the room, drawing his mother’s bloodshot eyes open. “*Tesoro*,” she sobbed, coming to her feet to wrap her arms around him.

He held her tight, letting his own tears fall freely. “Maman,” he said softly.

His father was given pain medicine, which the doctor assured him was done out of kindness. Over the next hour, he learned that his dad had stage four lung cancer, with metastases that had spread throughout his body. Given the disease’s severity, there were no measures that could be taken to save him.

Eventually, it was just he and his mother in the room. The quiet beeping from his father’s monitors being the only sound. “He had to know,” Will said softly. “He must have been in pain, Maman.”

She shook her head. “We went to the clinic, and they thought it was a virus. This... was months ago, though.”

“Had he been coughing up blood?” Will asked pointedly, feeling irrational anger with her over her imagined neglect.

“If he did, he did not tell me. Will, I did all I could. If I knew-”

“You don’t *speak* to each other,” Will said bitterly. “You don’t... take interest in one another!”

“That’s unfair,” she said reproachfully. “Will, I know it’s hard. I know. Despite our differences, I love him. I don’t... I don’t want *this*. I don’t want him to leave me!” Her tears

welled, making it difficult for her to speak.

In that moment, Will's anger relented. Of course, his mother never wanted this. Rationally, he knew that. "I'm sorry," he whispered, voice breaking.

"*I'm* sorry," she said thickly, sweeping tears from her cheeks. "We haven't... been honest with you. I should have realized that he would not be honest with me, either."

"What?"

She took a breath, squeezing his father's hand. "With how sick your father has been, we haven't... maintained the orchard. Anchise passed, and we did not hire someone to replace him. When Mafalda retired, we did not replace her, either. We thought... we thought we could handle it ourselves, but... we haven't. His breathing has been terrible, and this year we... we did not have a harvest."

Will blinked in shock, uncomprehending what his mother had just confessed to him. "So... the orchard is... not in good shape?"

"It is not," she confessed. "We put it for sale two weeks ago, Will."

It felt like there was ice in his veins, he was so hopelessly shocked. The orchard was, perhaps, the only place in the entire world where he felt like himself. It was the only place he'd ever felt joy, or at peace. His home in Wolf Trap was purchased because it reminded him of the orchard, at least a bit. The thought alone that it would be gone was far too horrible to consider. "You... you *can't* sell it. Maman, you can't."

"We have to," she said softly. "Especially now. I cannot maintain it alone, and... and I will be alone."

"You should have told me!" he whispered harshly.

"We did," she countered. "We told you that we needed the help, but... we did not want you to come out of obligation. We wanted you to come because you wanted to."

"I should have come," Will said self-depreciatingly. "I'm so sorry, Maman."

"We aren't angry with you, my darling boy," she promised. "You have a life for yourself, that's all we've ever wanted."

"I'm not happy," he told her honestly. "I haven't been in a long, long, time."

"You think we don't know?" she sighed. "Will, I'm your mother. I know. I also know that you wanted to see it through. You are your father's son, and... stubbornness abounds."

"They fired me," he blurted while a mortified blush crept up his cheeks. "Well, they *would* have if I hadn't quit. They found out... that I am... Mama, I've been seeing Hannibal. Romantically."

Her eyes lit up, a grateful laugh bubbling from her lips. “Have you? Oh, dear heart. He’s the love of your life. I’ve always known it. Your job... fired you for that?”

He shrugged. “Apparently being a homosexual makes me overly emotional. Like a *woman*, my boss said.”

“He sounds like a charming man,” she bristled. “You should never be ashamed for loving him, Will. He’s a good man.”

“I know he is,” Will sighed, leaning back in his seat to rub his stinging eyes. “He told me that he reached out to Dad a while ago. He never told me.”

“Hannibal asked us not to,” she shrugged. “He... he was not raised like you were. There was no understanding from his aunt or uncle. He needed time to figure out his life, and we respected his wishes. I knew you would find your way back to one another, though. Fate brought you together, Tesoro.”

“Fate keeps dragging us apart,” he muttered. “I don’t want to leave, Maman. I am going to stay, and I am going to get that orchard back to what it used to be. I want to make Dad proud of me, and... more than that, I want to do it because it makes *me* happy. I’ve stayed in the states because I wanted to prove to everyone that I was doing exactly what I wanted to do, and that I was successful, all while hating every moment of it. Every day, I wished I could be here, instead. For what? Because I didn’t want to admit that I had picked the wrong career, or because I didn’t want anyone to know that I had made a wrong decision when moving away. “I don’t have anything to prove though, do I? The only person paying for my mistakes is me. The only person who is suffering is me.”

“Stubborn,” came a weak, harsh, reply. Will blinked, turning to find his Dad’s eyes squinting open. “You’re my son, and you’re *stubborn*.”

Will shot off his seat, sitting on the edge of the bed to cup his father’s face. “Dad,” he sobbed.

“S’okay,” he said, clearing his throat. “Will, it’s okay.”

“You...” Will swept his tears from his cheeks. “You were listening?”

“Every word,” he whispered. “We’re proud of you, Will. Our pride doesn’t come from your imagined success. We’re proud because you are a good man with a big heart. You are kind. You are honest. You are bright and curious about the world.”

“I used to be,” Will said thickly.

“You still are,” he replied. “You are still learning who you are, and there’s nothing wrong with that. There’s nothing wrong with wanting a quiet life for yourself. Success isn’t determined by the height of your career, Will. Success is measured by the quality of your life. Achieving daily happiness. In the end, darling boy, that will be all that matters.”

“It brings me joy to be here,” Will sobbed. “It brings me joy to go fishing by the stream. I love harvesting the trees, and I love tending to the land. That’s what I love.”

“Then you’ve found exactly what you need, Will,” he smiled weakly. “And I have never been prouder of you.”

His father passed three hours later.

It felt like he’d waited for Will to say goodbye before passing on. Like he’d held on just long enough to see him one more time.

Will told him he loved him, and then he was gone.

Once the sobs subsided, he felt numb. He and his mother left the hospital, neither saying a word as he drove them back to the villa. It was a long drive, and his exhaustion coupled with his grief made it feel like the highest form of torture.

Listening to his mother’s quiet sobs was also heartbreaking.

The villa was cold and deserted when they arrived. There was no one there to turn on a porch light, nor to leave on a lamp in the foyer. Even in the darkness, it looked abandoned. The grass had grown high, the bushes in front untamed and wild. There was an acidic, fermented, over-ripe smell on the air. The scent of fruit that had grown ripe and fallen from the trees, heavy and cloying.

Perhaps worst of all was the ‘For Sale’ sign on the front of the property.

It would not be for sale for much longer.

He helped his mother into the house, making her a cup of tea while they eased one another’s grief. His heart felt like it was made of broken glass, and every breath he took hurt.

That night, after his mother had gone to bed, he went into his father’s study. There were papers on his desk that he’d been perusing, and his glasses were under the lamp. All of these things would never again be touched by his father, and the reality of what had happened finally hit him.

He sobbed.

He sobbed for not coming to see his father sooner. He sobbed for leaving in the first place. His tears felt like fire with all that he’d cried in the last twenty-four hours, and it didn’t seem like there was an end to them.

There was only one person he wanted in that moment, but he was four thousand miles away. There was only one person he wanted, but it was time for him to let him go.

He picked up the phone with shaking hands, dialing Hannibal’s number. He had no idea what time it was in Baltimore, and he didn’t care to try and do the math.

“Hello?” came the immediate, desperate answer.

“Hannibal,” Will said thickly, swallowing tears as well as regret.

“Will, thank god,” he sighed. “How is your father?”

“He... he’s gone,” Will gasped, clutching his chest through his grief. “He passed a few hours ago.”

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered, his own tears evident in the thickness of his voice. “I loved him dearly, Will. He was a wonderful man.”

“Yes,” he agreed, resting his face in his hands. “I... I needed to speak with you. It’s... it’s important.”

“Anything you need, beloved,” Hannibal promised.

“I am not coming home,” he said softly. “My mother needs me. The orchard... has been neglected to the point where they put it for sale without me knowing. I can’t let it be sold, Hannibal. I can’t. This... this is the only place that has ever felt like home for me, and... I can’t let it fall to ruin like this. I can’t let someone else take it. I am needed here, and... and more than that, I want to be here.”

It was silent for some time before Hannibal spoke. “You... you’re never coming back?” he asked brokenly.

“I’m sorry,” he winced, shocked when more tears coursed down his cheeks. “I love you. God, do I love you. I love you more than I’ve ever loved anyone, Hannibal. I don’t want you to think I don’t, or that I didn’t love you enough to come back. My heart resides in your chest. My breath is in your lungs. I just... I have to do this. I have to. For me. For my mother. This is... this is important to me, and... and I can’t ask you to uproot your life for me. I won’t ask you to. I just... need you to know that this decision is not made lightly. My happiness resides on the edge of a blade, right between being here and being with you.”

“I understand,” he said after a moment of thick silence. “I love you, Will. I understand, and I am... I am not angry. I’ve only ever wanted you to be happy.”

“My dogs,” Will said through a sob. “Please. Please, give them to good homes. Make sure they’re... loved. I know Alana will take Buster, and maybe even Winston. If you could, I would appreciate it if you would box my things for me. The... the important things. I’ll be hiring a real estate agent who will send the boxes to me when the time comes.”

“Will,” Hannibal finally broke. “Please. Please. We can... we can work something out. I know we can. Don’t do this. Don’t.”

“It’s done,” Will said with a deep sigh. “I never meant to hurt you like this. I’m not doing it out of revenge.”

“Of course, you’re not,” Hannibal whispered. “I know, Will. You’re where you need to be. I forgive you.”

“Make sure Billowy the Second is in one of those boxes,” Will pleaded. “The sketch you drew me. Please.”

“I will,” Hannibal replied, though he sounded very far away already. “I’ll take care of everything. Don’t worry.”

“Hannibal,” Will said desperately. “I love you. I am so, so, in love with you.”

“Always,” Hannibal replied. “I have always been yours, Will. Take care of yourself, and take care of your mother. Don’t worry about anything here, alright?”

“Alright,” Will’s tears were becoming difficult to breathe through, and he choked through a sob. “Be happy, Hannibal.”

“I plan to be,” came the immediate reply.

Chapter End Notes

We officially have one more chapter, then an epilogue. woot!

A few things first! So JACK. Jack. Keep in mind this takes place in the 90's, and he would have been a man of those times. Women in the FBI were given a hard time, and had to work twice as hard as the men did. Doing some research for this story, I watched a bunch of interviews with women who worked there in the 80's and 90's. Jesus. They went through some shit.

As far as gay agents, I am basing this outlook on assumption. You could not be gay in the military, so I imagine their outlook on openly gay agents could not have been welcoming.

I know this chapter ends on a rough note, but I am promising a HEA. <3

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He went with his mother the following day to the funeral home that would be handling his father's... preparations. They chose a casket, or maybe more accurately, *he* chose it while his mother sobbed in the bathroom. When she came back, they made decisions on what his father would like, including what cemetery would be his final resting place.

Through all of it, Will felt like he wasn't present. His father's family was buried in the states, so they chose a cemetery that was close to the villa so they could visit him. There had never been a discussion about what his father wanted after he died, so Will made the decisions for him. Each one felt wrong, no matter the fact that he made all of them with his father in mind.

His parents weren't overly religious, yet his mother insisted that the funeral take place in a church. To make things easier, they scheduled the wake to take place there as well, before they went to the cemetery to say goodbye.

On the morning of his funeral, the phone rang, so Will answered it. "Hello?" he asked, distractedly attempting to knot a tie around his neck.

"Will," Hannibal greeted, knocking the air from Will's lungs. "I know... I know today is the funeral, and... I wanted to tell you that I am thinking of you, and your family."

Will bit back a sob, sitting heavily in his father's leather chair. "Thank you," he said after a beat, once he'd regained control of himself. "It's... it's been very difficult."

"I wish I was there with you," he sighed.

"I wish that, too," Will whispered. "I appreciate that you're... that you're taking care of things for me there, though. Are... are my dogs..." he couldn't bear to ask if they were given away yet, but Hannibal understood.

"I still have them," he said, clearing his throat. "They are well cared for, Will."

"Thank you," he breathed, feeling just a touch better about that, at least. "I know I have no right to say it, but I miss you. I miss you so much it feels like I can't fucking breathe."

"You have every right to say it," Hannibal said softly. "I feel... I feel the same way. It pains me that I am not there with you, but..."

"You're taking care of my dogs, finding them homes, managing my house," Will sighed. "I know why you're not here, and I appreciate you. I love you, Hannibal."

“I love you,” he promised, longing evident in his voice. “So much, Will. Please, offer my condolences to your mother. I love your parents, and I don’t want her to think I do not care.”

“She knows you do,” Will assured him while wrapping the phone cord around his finger. “I told her what you were doing for me, and she’s grateful. Thank you for calling. It’s... it’s so appreciated.”

“My heart is with you, beloved,” Hannibal promised. “Take care of yourself, alright?”

“I will,” he replied thickly. “Talk to you... soon,” he said, though he couldn’t be sure that was true.

The call ended, breaking whatever was left of Will’s heart.

His funeral was an enormous affair. People came from far and wide to attend. He should have known, really. His father was a social butterfly, with connections around the world because of his career. Will shook hands with countless people who wanted to offer their condolences. For Will, it was overwhelming, because he did not know most of them, and he didn’t fucking care what they felt or thought. It was cruel, he knew. They were being kind. All he wanted to do, though, was be alone with a bottle of whiskey.

After they left the cemetery, people came back to the villa. He hated this fucking habit more than anything in the world. He and his mother were grieving, and they had an astounding amount of work to do. Yet, here they were on the day of his father’s burial, hosting somewhere around fifty people.

More than anything else, it felt like fucking work.

Mafalda came to help at least, which eased Will’s burden as he filled wine glasses and replaced empty cheese platters. The hoard of people didn’t stay long, but even the three hours they stayed felt like too much. Once they were gone, he had to do cleanup, which took another few hours.

By the time he showered and changed, it was well after seven and his mother was already asleep. She hadn’t been sleeping well, and Will knew it because he hadn’t been sleeping well, either.

After the funeral, the house had a wounded feel to it. His father’s absence was painful, so Will threw himself into working outside.

The sheer volume of things that needed to be done were a constant weight on him, preventing him from finding even a moment of peace. He worried for his mother. He worried about the orchard. He grieved the loss of his father, always.

His grief caught him in unsuspecting ways. There was a jar of Nutella in the cabinet, which was his father’s favorite guilty pleasure. There were cigarettes hidden in the bottom drawer of

his desk, no doubt the reason his father was gone in the first place.

His mother was not ready to go through his father's things, and if Will was honest, neither was he. Instead, he headed outside where he felt most comfortable. He'd always loved working with his hands.

Getting the grass tamed was easy. Trimming back the bushes was a pleasurable distraction. A few pieces of trim on the house were rotten and breaking, so Will dug out the ladder and replaced it, painting the trim over so it gleamed and shined.

The orchard, however, was in a severe state.

Having no idea what to do with all the rotten fruit, he simply piled it into the wheelbarrow and composted it for the following spring. All the fruit on the ground had attracted rodents and insects, which would also, at some point, need to be dealt with.

It took him the better part of a week to do just that simple task, before he moved on to weeding the orchard.

He worked tirelessly, from sunup till sundown, stopping only for food and water that his mother brought him. There was a part of him that felt guilty for not tending to her the way that he should be, but every day, his aunts and uncles stopped in with food and words of consolation that Will simply couldn't utter himself.

He'd lost his father and the love of his life in a single day. It was too much for him to bear.

At night, after the sun went down, he went out to the side garden and sat on the rock wall that Hannibal had retreated to all those years ago. Usually, he did so with a bottle of whiskey or rosatello for his company.

The first night, he found he could not even get to the wall in the first place. Not with the way the trees and bushes had overtaken the yard. The next day, he made it his personal goal to trim everything back to its rightful place.

He thought of Hannibal always. He missed his dogs. In his depression, he'd think about how the only person he'd go to with his problems was now gone. His father. The rock of his life... was gone.

The orchard felt like an uphill battle that he was doomed to lose. Even after a full week of weeding, it was already in need of it again. The irrigation system was acting up, which meant that on the second week, instead of working in the garden, he was trouble-shooting the ancient system that hadn't been upgraded since he was a child.

His realtor got in touch with him at the end of the second week as well, letting him know that his house in Wolf Trap was no longer his house at all, and a check would be deposited directly into his account here in Lombardy, once the closing was final.

All of that money would inevitably be poured into the orchard, he knew. The roof of the villa wasn't in great shape. The irrigation system would need to be redone in the spring. The water

heater was working by the grace of God alone.

Will knew he could handle it himself, but the way things were piling up, he had no fucking idea where he would find the time.

“Will,” his mother called while he ruminated on the patio, already drunk despite the earliness of the hour. “Did you eat something, darling?”

He shook his head, staring out at the endless burden before him. “Not yet.”

“This... this is enough, now,” she said sternly, withdrawing his whiskey glass from his hand. “If you’re going to be this unhappy, then I want you to go back to the states. I never wanted this for you.”

Guilt crushed him, and he shook his head again. “No, Maman. I’m... I’m fine, okay? Just... stressed. There’s a lot to do, and... I was just realizing that I’d need to hire another set of hands. I can do it. Don’t worry, okay?”

She looked doubtful, but she did at least hand his glass back to him before heading into the house.

At the beginning of week three, Alana called the villa.

“Hey Will,” she said softly. “I spoke with Hannibal a few weeks ago, and... well, I am so sorry.”

“I should have called you,” he grimaced. “Forgive me for not thinking of it.”

“Nothing to apologize for,” she promised. “Are you... are you really not coming back?”

“You know as well as I do that I wasn’t happy. That job... that job wasn’t good for me. I’m needed here, and more than that, I want to be here. I feel terribly for leaving without a word, but...”

“I understand why you did,” she assured him. “I’m not upset. I offered to take some of your dogs, but... Hannibal kept them all.”

Will paused. “I’m sorry? He kept them *all*?”

“He did,” she chuckled. “You know that man loves you, don’t you? He’s been so busy lately, and he is refusing to give away a single one of them. I thought you might like to know that they’re very well cared for.”

He swept a few tears from his cheeks, giving himself a minute to gather himself. “I do like to know. Thank you for telling me. Is he... is he alright?”

“He misses you,” she said immediately. “I don’t know what he’s doing, but... every time I reach out, he’s busy. Keeping himself too busy to miss you, I think.”

If there was anything he understood, it was that. He'd kept himself moving since his father had passed. What he'd learned, though, was that no matter how busy his hands were, he still found time to miss his father. To miss Hannibal. His dogs. "Keeping busy doesn't work," he muttered, mostly to himself.

"I'm sure it doesn't," she sighed. "I miss you, for what it's worth."

"Miss you, too," he said, even if he hadn't particularly thought of her since he'd come back to Italy. It made him feel guilty, because she'd always been a good friend. "If you are ever allowed to take a vacation, why don't you come for a visit? We have a guestroom."

"Come to Italy?" she asked in surprise. "I... well, maybe I could swing it this summer, if the offer still stands?"

"It'll still stand," Will promised. "It would be really nice to see you."

"Likewise," she agreed. "I ran into someone you know the other day. Margot?"

"Wow," he chuckled. "How is she?"

Alana hesitated. "She's... good. I saw her at a restaurant, and... we got to talking. She's... wonderful."

"She is," Will agreed easily.

"Uh," Alana cleared her throat. "I've been seeing her since then."

"You've been hanging out with Margot?"

"I've been... well. God, this is awkward. I've been... seeing her. Romantically, Will."

Will sat down heavily in his father's leather chair, completely shocked. "Seriously?"

"Is that alright?"

He laughed. "Of course, it is. I'm just... surprised."

"Believe me, so am I," she agreed with a relieved laugh. "But I'm also happy. Happier than I've ever been with anyone else. I know it's probably strange."

"It's not," he promised. "All I want is for the both of you to be happy, so... I'm glad. Truly."

"Good," she breathed. "Good. God, I'm so relieved."

"Did you really think I would be angry?" he asked.

"I don't know," she chuckled. "I was interested in Hannibal, too. I didn't want you to think I went shopping in you exes."

Something sharp jabbed at Will's heart. Hannibal... Hannibal was his *ex*. He'd never considered him that way, but... he was. Will had ended it. It was over. The realization felt

crushing. “Right. Well, I hope to see you this summer. If you’re still with Margot, bring her. I promise not to make it weird.”

She laughed. “Alright. Take care of yourself, please. And keep in touch?”

“I will. Promise.”

By week four, he was feeling a little better about the orchard. He’d taken the time to make a list for himself, in order of importance, of things that needed to be done. It gave him single-minded purpose on those specific issues, which gave him no time to miss Hannibal, his Dad, his dogs, or his little house that he never realized that he loved until it was gone.

He rarely spoke to anyone, avoiding the house during the day when family would visit. What did he have to say? His family were the kindest people, but he could not listen to their words of encouragement anymore. What he needed was help, but his cousins never once came outside to do so. Why would they? They had their own orchards and vineyards to tend to. For that, he held no grudges. Everyone had their own shit to deal with, he figured. Some more than others.

All he wanted was to call Hannibal. It grew and grew, taking over his every thought. Just his voice. That’s all. Maybe he could ask if he still had his dogs. Maybe he could just tell him that his every waking thought was filled with him and him alone.

He couldn’t. More importantly, he wouldn’t. It wasn’t fair to either of them, after everything they’d been through. He owed Hannibal a clean break to allow the other man to move on. He was divorced, now. There would be a line of men who would thrill at the chance of having such a perfect partner.

God, was that a fucking bitter thought. After everything they’d been through, they’d found on another again. After everything, they still lost one another.

At the end of the fourth week, he was outside changing the oil on their tractor. By the look of it, the oil hadn’t been changed in years. There was grease caked so thick that he’d almost broke his hand trying to get the cap off, never mind the struggle to get the oil pan out so he could change the grimy filter.

It was in such bad shape that he was resolved to look at all the equipment after this. It wouldn’t do anyone any good if they blew a motor in the springtime.

He was immersed in his task, sweeping sweat from his forehead as something big brushed his leg. “Jesus fucking Christ!” he wailed in surprise, leaping away from whatever had touched him.

When he turned, he almost couldn’t make sense of what he was seeing.

Winston. Winston was here, jumping on the back of his legs. “What?” he muttered, looking up as a herd of dogs rounded the corner of the house.

All of them were here. Every single one of his dogs was here.

He had no idea why or how, but he sobbed while dropping to his knees to greet each and every one of them. “Hi, babies,” he laughed through his tears. “Oh, God, I’ve missed you guys.”

After wiping the excess oil from his hands onto his jeans, he pet them all, watching them roll in the grass in their excitement. He heard a car door close from the front of the house. “Let’s go see, guys. Who brought you to me, huh?”

He had an idea, of course. It was still a shock to see him standing by a moving truck, looking travel-rumpled and beautiful. “Will,” he said softly.

There was no hesitation. Will ran to him, throwing himself in his arms. He sobbed into Hannibal’s neck, holding him so tight that the other man grunted. “You’re here.”

“I’m here,” Hannibal sighed, pressing a kiss against his sweaty neck. Will pulled away with a grimace, realizing only then that he’d smeared motor oil into Hannibal’s blue button-down.

“I’m so sorry,” Will blurted in embarrassment. “I’m filthy, and your shirt-”

“I don’t give a single shit, Will,” he promised, tears coursing down his perfect cheekbones. “I missed you so much.”

Since the damage was done, Will held him in his arms, holding him tightly. “I missed you, too. You... you brought me my dogs.”

“I did. I would have been here sooner, but it's remarkably difficult to get animals overseas legally.”

“Is... is that all you brought me?” he asked softly.

“The love of my life needs help with his orchard,” Hannibal replied, pulling away to cup Will’s dirty cheek. “I can help, Will.”

He laughed gratefully, so overwhelmed that he couldn’t speak for a moment. “For a few weeks... or?”

“Or the rest of my life, if you’ll have me,” he smiled. He looked almost terrified when he added, “Please have me.”

“You’re all I’ve *ever* wanted,” Will promised him. “It’s not fair that you had to give up your whole life for me. I never wanted that.”

“I left a job that I hated to be here with you,” he said lowly. “I sold a house that never felt like home, because you... *you* are my home. I haven’t given up anything to be here, beloved. This... this is all I’ve ever wanted for you, Will. For the both of us. A home where we can be

happy. Where we can be together. Where better than here in Italy?" he asked with a hesitant smile.

"That's all I want," Will promised thickly, gripping Hannibal's shoulder to haul him closer. "It's beautiful, Hannibal. I love you so dearly."

Hannibal scooped him off the ground as he dogs jumped at their legs, their mouths meeting in a clumsy clash of desperation. Will held him tight, laughing against his mouth. "Hannibal," he said thickly, unable to believe how lucky he was in that moment.

"Will," he sighed. "You told me that I loved a ghost. That there was no way I could love the man that you are now. Do you... do you understand how wrong you were? I love you for exactly who you are. I love you for who you *will* be. I will love you until I no longer draw breath, and even then, I will love you from wherever the afterlife takes me. I need you to know that. I need you to understand."

"I do," Will whispered. "I was upset when I said that, you know. I know you do. Sometimes, I think you deserve better-"

"There is *no one* better," he interjected, shaking his head. "You're it for me. You're everything."

"You're home," Will said softly, cupping his cheek with a hand so filthy that it marred his flawless face. Hannibal did not seem to give a shit, because he pressed Will's hand closer with his palm, a vibrant smile splitting his lips.

"I'm home," he promised.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was meant to be longer, with Will suffering for most of it. I couldn't do that to him. It wasn't fair to either of them, because they've freaking suffered enough. haah

ONE MORE CHAPTER for an epilogue, which will be going up AS SOON AS I finish editing, so like... 20 minutes!

<333

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Eight Months Later

"Let me know if water comes out," Will called from across the orchard while diddling with their new irrigation system.

"Should... should there be no water right now?" Hannibal called, sounding uncertain.

Will laughed, squinting into the sunshine. "There shouldn't be, no. Is there?"

"It's been leaking the whole time, yes," he grimaced. "Let me call someone, beloved. You fix boat motors, not irrigation systems."

"Same shit," Will shrugged, turning a few knobs. "*Now*?"

"Was something supposed to change?" Hannibal wondered.

"Yes?"

"Then no," he chuckled. "It's still leaking."

"Fuck," Will sighed, sweeping a frustrated hand through his hair. "Call the guy, Hannibal. I have no idea what I'm doing."

"Turn the water off, darling."

"It... it *is* off. I think."

"The main line, beloved," Hannibal laughed.

"Oh. Yeah, alright."

The orchard was exactly where it should be at this time of year, thanks to Hannibal. In the beginning of the spring, he hired an army of people to come and tend the trees, lessening the burden of the upkeep on both of them.

Over the course of the fall, Hannibal had all the old plumbing in the house updated and replaced, including the hot water tank. Because he was Hannibal, he had the bathrooms updated as well, and Will reaped the reward of their enormous shower every single day.

Will's mother stayed with them until December, when she moved back to Milan where she felt more comfortable. She'd be coming back here for the summer months, and Will couldn't

wait to show her everything he'd done.

On paper, he and Hannibal owned the villa now. It would always be his mother's home, though. She was welcome to be with them however long she wanted to be.

The interior of the home had a few updates as well. Fresh paint on the walls, new furniture that Hannibal brought with him from Baltimore, and new kitchen appliances that Hannibal claimed he needed in order to cook the way he liked to. Will didn't care what he did to the kitchen, because he was here.

Hannibal walked over to him, pressing a kiss against his cheek. "You tried, darling. It just needs to be... fine-tuned, that's all."

"I'm going to watch him get it running," Will groused. "That way I can do it next time. It should come on by itself with timers, but... I don't fucking know how to set it."

"I'll see if he can come out today," Hannibal smiled. "For now, let's go inside and have some lunch, alright?"

The weather was still cool despite it being early May, but Hannibal was already tanned from his time outside. When Will found him, he was at the kitchen counter tossing tomatoes in olive oil and seasonings with Max begging for food by his feet.

The strong line of his back was evident with the tee shirt he was wearing, his narrow hips swaying as he reached for the salt on the counter. His hair was lightening again with how much time he spent outside, which made him look, in complete honesty, just like he did twelve years ago when they shared their first summer together.

He wrapped his arms around Hannibal's waist, which stilled the other man, and pressed a kiss to his shoulder. "You are beautiful, you know."

"Said the Adonis," Hannibal chuckled. "Is it the dirt on my tee or the sweat on my back that has you so enraptured?"

"All of it," Will promised, kissing the nape of his neck this time. He smelled of coconut sunscreen, the salt of his sweat, and delicious cologne. Fuck, he even smelled exactly the same. With a roll of his hips against Hannibal's backside, he slid his hand under the thin shirt, dragging his fingers up Hannibal's trim belly. "Christ, I feel seventeen when I look at you."

Hannibal turned, lunch abandoned, and grasped Will's ass to haul him close. He nosed against Will's neck, pressing kisses against his jawline. "I feel the same about you," he whispered. "Do you have any idea how happy I am, beloved?"

Will grinned, tipping his head back to make room for Hannibal's wandering mouth. "I know exactly how happy you are, because we are the same. Do you love your orchard, Dr. Lecter?"

"I love my orchard," he agreed with a laugh. "I love the man who owns it with me, as well."

“Even if he can’t set up an irrigation system without help?” Will laughed.

“How could I fault you for that?” he wondered. “You know everything else there is to know about maintaining the grounds. It makes me feel... inept, sometimes. I feel more like a burden than a help.”

“You’re an incredible help, Hannibal,” Will promised because it was true. He pressed a kiss against Hannibal’s cheek while holding the other in his hand. “You have poured your whole heart into this, and I see it, you know. It’s not easy, and it’s not anything like what you did before this. I love you. I love that you’re learning. I love that you care enough to try. Don’t ever feel inept, okay? You’re... perfect.”

Hannibal bit his lip as if considering something. “I was doing some research,” he said slowly. “Do you know that you can make wines from fruit? It’s... a trend that is becoming more prominent now.”

“Is it?” Will chuckled. “And... you like that?”

“I am very skilled at fermentation,” he nodded. “I used to brew my own beer and bottle my own wines. They were made from grapes, mind you, but the process is the same.”

“You want to make... apricot wine?” he asked, just to be sure.

He nodded eagerly. “Peach, apricot, pomegranate, and cherry, yes. Perhaps blends made of them. I’ve spoken with the vineyard down the road, and he would be willing to sell a fraction of his harvest to us. Tempranillo grapes. They’re exquisite.”

“You’ll need equipment for that,” Will smiled, watching the way Hannibal’s eyes shone with excitement. “Maybe even another building for it.”

“With your permission, I’d like to have something built out back,” Hannibal admitted. “I’d even like to try fermented ciders with our apples. I could use champagne yeast, and use fresh cinnamon. It would be like a bottle of apple pie, Will.”

“Christ, that sounds amazing,” Will chuckled. “I support you in anything you want to do. You know that. There’s at least another fourteen acres of our property that haven’t been cultivated. We have the money and the room to do whatever you want, darling.”

“Will it upset your mother to see... big changes like this?” he asked, big hands hauling Will a little closer so he could kiss Will’s neck.

“I don’t think so,” he said uncertainly. “It’s still in the family, and it’s being cared for. I think... I think that’s all she’d want. Besides, my Dad would have adored the idea of wines being made from his orchards. I know him enough to know that.”

“I’ll move forward with the plans, then,” Hannibal beamed, pressing a thankful kiss to Will’s lips.

“What’s for lunch?” he asked, nosing over Hannibal’s shoulder to take a peek.

“Mafalda brought me fresh mozzarella this morning, so I am making a grilled chicken caprese with Roma tomatoes and lemon basil that I grew myself.”

Will chuckled. “Proud of yourself, are you?”

“Quite,” he grinned. “Now shoo! You’re an utter distraction, and my chicken is marinating.”

In the evening, it had become their habit to enjoy a glass of wine with their dinner. Hannibal thrived in Italy, consistently thrilled with the endless array of fresh ingredients at his disposal. It shocked Will sometimes, how wildly domestic his partner was. There was nothing he enjoyed more than cooking a good meal, aside from maybe serving it with a beaming smile. The house was always orderly and neat. To be honest, Will had no idea where he found the time to do the things he did, but he was always on top of everything, handling every detail with perfect elegance.

The people at the produce market knew him by name, and knew what he liked. All of his pretentious traits from Baltimore were shed like a suit that didn’t fit, and what was left was a friendly, kind, man that adored taking care of those that he loved.

Initially, Will was certain he wouldn’t care for this life, no matter how much he might have enjoyed his six weeks here all those years ago. It was shocking to realize that he was very, very, wrong.

Hannibal was excellent at canning, making pasta sauces, fruit preserves, and pickled everything. What was even crazier was that the things he made were incredible, and he already had a waiting list for when he began canning his famous vodka sauce and garlic marinara.

Mafalda was teaching him to make cheese, which he was determined to enhance with his own special ingredients. He made apricot goat cheese that was so good it didn’t make it back in the fridge. Will couldn’t wait to see what he would do once their orchard was producing later in the summer. He already knew it would be incredible.

Hannibal was thriving, and in turn, Will was, too. He’d never been good about managing stress. Not even when he was younger, really. There was always too much to do, which would occasionally weigh on him. His partner was there to share the burden, though, and always knew exactly what Will needed to unwind.

Sometimes it was gentle words of encouragement, and sometimes it was a delicious meal. Most often, he spread Will out on the bed and ate at the core of him until Will felt like he would sob if Hannibal didn’t fuck him, and soon.

Will didn’t know that it could be like this. He had Hannibal for those six weeks all those years ago, and he’d never had another physical relationship that could even remotely

compare. They were making up for lost time, and in his opinion, they were ahead of themselves.

Their first night alone after his mother returned to Milan, Hannibal cooked them an incredible dinner. He couldn't fucking say what he made, because all he could think about was how gorgeous Hannibal was at the dinner table. How his eyes twinkled with his radiant joy.

The way his veins stood out on his forearms and hands. The boyish grin on his face. Without even speaking a word, he dropped to his knees at the dinner table and undid Hannibal's fly. "What-" Hannibal had sputtered, eyes widening as Will withdrew his flaccid cock and sucked it into his eager mouth.

"Will," he gasped, spreading his thighs a bit, making room. All Will remembered from that night was the little gasps and moans that Hannibal had made. The way his fingers carded through his curls, as though he couldn't believe it were happening.

He remembered the way Hannibal had flooded his mouth within minutes, as if he were so ridiculously turned on that he couldn't help himself. He was good to Hannibal too, just... in his own way.

Once the weather started getting warmer, Will spent his free time by the stream. Hannibal often joined him, either attempting to fish as well, or sketching in the grass behind him. While the orchard was work, it never *felt* like work. Mostly, it felt like a miracle that he had the opportunity to live exactly as he wanted to, with the only person he'd ever wanted by his side.

The following weekend, after completing their morning chores, they were free to do as they pleased. The automated irrigation system was working, and working beautifully. It was one less thing that Will needed to worry over.

With their afternoon free, they packed a lunch and rode their bikes to the berm.

It was exactly the same as it was all those years ago, untouched completely by time. Hannibal seemed nostalgic, wading into the icy water with barely a wince of discomfort. "Nothing has changed, here," he marveled.

Will hissed while stepping into the water, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's waist. "We have," he sighed.

Hannibal cupped his face in his palm, eyes brimming with affection. "You haven't aged a day, beloved. You're more beautiful than ever."

Will hugged him close, pressing his face into his throat to inhale the scent of him into his lungs. "You smell the same," Will remarked with a laugh. "You are still gorgeous. You have laugh lines now, though. I love them dearly."

Without a word, Hannibal took his hand and led them to the hillside, plopping down in the grass more or less where they shared their very first kiss. Will grinned while settling beside him, leaning back on his elbows. “Feeling nostalgic?” he asked with a wink.

“Very,” Hannibal agreed, leaning in to kiss him. Will withdrew, parting his mouth in a dare that made Hannibal smile wide. He flicked his tongue out, licking Hannibal’s bottom lip, teeth, then top lip, in a perfect mimic of their first kiss all those years ago.

The only difference was this time, Hannibal didn’t pull away when Will’s tongue dipped into his mouth. He didn’t press Will back when he straddled Hannibal’s waist.

He didn’t do a thing aside from moan when Will cupped his perfect cock in his hand. “I love you,” he breathed against Hannibal’s lips.

“And I love you,” he smiled, eyes closed as Will pressed kisses against his flawless cheekbone. “Marry me, Will.”

Will paused, leaning back in his lap to look at him. “How?”

“I’ve no idea,” Hannibal chuckled. “I just... I want to know that you would. If we can. When we can. I want the world to know what you mean to me. I want to call you my husband. I want to wear a ring that marks me as yours. I don’t just want your first name, Will. I want your last.”

“Yes,” Will replied easily, so overwhelmed that tears coursed down his cheeks. “Yes, I will marry you, if we ever can.”

Hannibal kissed him gratefully, his smile pressed right against Will’s own. “Graham-Lecter, or Lecter-Graham?” he wondered with a brilliant laugh.

“Graham-Lecter,” Will giggled, hugging Hannibal tight.

“I am you, and you are me,” he replied, pressing kisses down Will’s throat. “What am I thinking about?” he asked, harkening back to that night in the garden all those years ago.

“You,” Will responded, earning a groan of affirmation in response. “Our orchard. The dogs. What I’m making for dinner. I’m wondering why we didn’t bring lube with us,” Will laughed, and Hannibal chuckled against his skin. “What am I thinking about, if you are me?” he asked.

“Exactly the same things that I am thinking about,” Hannibal agreed easily.

“We are the same,” Will said, pressing a kiss against his lips.

“Hannibal,” the love of his life whispered.

“Will,” he replied, endlessly blissful in Hannibal’s arms.

Chapter End Notes

I started this story a freaking year ago, and it feels... GOD so sad that it's over. Thank you all for sticking with me, and dealing with the long waits between updates. I appreciate every kind word and kudo, I promise you.

I have been struggling with medical bills since my lung injuries post-covid. If any of you want to help me, anything is appreciated, even simply sharing this link. I hate doing this, but I know that a few of you said you would help if there were a place to donate. I am now in a place where I unfortunately need the help. =[
https://gofund.me/52bd40ef

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